











**INDIA:  
A RE-STATEMENT**





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## PREFACE

THE *Report on the Constitutional Problem in India*, which I submitted to Nuffield College in 1942-3, was intended for students of politics and government, and it took for granted a general knowledge of India's past and of the origin and character of the British Raj. In the following pages the growth of Indian self-government becomes again the dominant theme, and the gist of the *Report* is reproduced in summary form; but the historical background is now sketched in, and more attention is paid to other than constitutional questions. The book is thus an attempt to re-state the main facts of India's connexion with Britain as a whole.

R. C.

~~Wood~~on Hill  
September 1945



# CONTENTS

## PART ONE

### The Process of Subjection

I. INDIA AND EUROPE . . . . .	I
II. THE BEGINNINGS OF BRITISH RULE . . . . .	15
III. THE EXPANSION OF BRITISH RULE . . . . .	28

## PART TWO

### The British Raj

I. THE POLITICAL ASPECT . . . . .	42
II. THE ECONOMIC ASPECT . . . . .	52
III. BALANCE SHEET . . . . .	64

## PART THREE

### The Process of Liberation

I. THE PROBLEM OF SELF-GOVERNMENT . . . . .	71
II. THE BIRTH OF INDIAN NATIONALISM . . . . .	84
III. THE BRITISH RESPONSE . . . . .	99
IV. THE NEW POLICY ON TRIAL . . . . .	117
V. THE APPROACH TO DOMINION STATUS . . . . .	127
VI. PROVINCIAL SELF-GOVERNMENT . . . . .	149
VII. THE POLICY OF THE CONGRESS . . . . .	166
VIII. THE MOSLEM REACTION . . . . .	183
IX. WAR AND DEADLOCK . . . . .	193
X. CRIPPS AND GANDHI . . . . .	210

## PART FOUR

## The Future of India

I. THE PRESENT SITUATION . . . . .	225
II. POSSIBILITIES OF A SETTLEMENT . . . . .	259
III. BRITAIN AND INDIA: THE LAST CHAPTER . . . . .	280

## DOCUMENTS

I. THE MISGOVERNMENT OF OUDH . . . . .	289
II. BRITISH FORECASTS OF INDIAN SELF-GOVERNMENT	291
III. THE CONGRESS AND THE MOSLEM LEAGUE IN 1937	294
IV. STATEMENT OF BRITISH POLICY, 14 JUNE 1945 . . . . .	295
V. BROADCAST BY LORD WAVELL, 19 SEPTEMBER 1945	299
STATISTICS OF POPULATION AND COMMUNITIES . . . . .	301
INDEX . . . . .	303
MAPS: BRITISH INDIA AND THE INDIAN STATES . . . . .	37
THE INDIAN PROVINCES AND STATES SINCE 1937 . . . . .	

*At the End*



# Part One

## THE PROCESS OF SUBJECTION

### I

## India and Europe

### I. CHRISTIAN EUROPE AND HINDU INDIA

BECAUSE Asia is mapped as a single 'continent', it is commonly supposed that it possesses an Asiatic or Eastern civilisation comparable with the European civilisation of the West. But India and China, with their vast territories and hundreds of millions of people, might well be regarded as continents in themselves, and India even more so than China, because it is fenced off from the rest of Asia by the greatest mountain-barrier in the world. Thus India, like China, has become the home of a civilisation which is as distinct from those of most other Asiatic countries as it is from those of Europe and America. In some respects, indeed, India has more in common with the West than with China or Malaysia; and though, in the course of ages, climate and ways of life and thought have drawn apart the European and Indian branches of the human family, there is still some significance in the fact that their prehistoric ancestors came—no one knows exactly when—from the same primeval homeland—no one knows exactly where—and imposed on the aboriginal peoples of both continental areas those same basic forms of speech and cult and custom which are called Aryan or Indo-European.

From the dawn of history till the Middle Ages the fate of Europe and of India was roughly similar. Both of them projections from the central land-mass of the Old World, both suffered from a series of invasions by migrant peoples—Europe mainly from the north-east, India mainly through the north-western breaches in its mountain wall—and both were also afflicted by internal strife. The greater part of Europe was unified for a period under the Roman Empire, which kept the 'barbarians' out and imposed the *Pax Romana* within. After its fall the various peoples of Europe gradually developed that sense of separate corporate individuality—whether derived from race or land or language or custom or common experience—which has become known as nationality. This process was hastened and confirmed by geography: for the

physical map of Europe, with its deeply indented coast, its peninsulas and inland seas and islands, and its mountain ranges, might seem to have been drawn so as to foster separatism and hinder unity; and from the Dark Ages to the present day Europe has been torn by constant war between its component states. Nevertheless, while it has never recovered that large measure of political unity which the Romans gave it, it has retained through all its vicissitudes an underlying unity of culture woven out of Christianity and Hellenism. Though it has been deliberately repudiated by the barbarous cult of Prussianism and for a time, which now seems to be passing, by the isolationist doctrine of Soviet Russia, European civilisation is more than a phrase. Most European peoples are aware that they are Europeans and that they share certain common standards of belief and behaviour. Every one knows that on the strengthening of that consciousness and on its increasing embodiment in political and economic combination the hopes of all Europe depend.

Up to a point the history of India followed much the same course. The service rendered to a great part of Europe by the Roman Empire was rendered to a great part of India by the Maurya Empire (about 320-184 B.C.), linked with the names of Chandragupta and Asoka, and by the Gupta Empire (about A.D. 320-500), the golden age of Hindu culture. The map, it might seem, should have made the maintenance of political unity easier in India than in Europe. The Indian coastline is singularly unbroken. There are only two large islands off it. There is only one large peninsula. No great natural frontier crosses the mainland. The one formidable barrier, the Vindhya Mountains and the adjacent belt of rocky ground and desert, is much easier to penetrate than the major barriers in Europe; and, though there are inevitable differences of climate and vegetation in a land which stretches from 8 to 35 degrees north of the Equator, the whole of it is exposed to a scorching summer sun and depends for its very life on its river waters and seasonal rains. Thus the physical character of India seems to make for unity as much as that of Europe makes for separatism. But India is a vast country, as big as Europe without Russia; and, till the advent of modern science, mere distance was almost as estranging as alps and inland seas. Hence the Mauryas and the Guptas failed to master all India as the Romans failed to master all Europe, and between and after those periods of relative unity and peace India was riven at least as much as Europe by the growth of separate and conflicting

states. The political pattern, indeed, was even more capricious and unstable.

Yet in India as in Europe there was a kind of unity behind all the strife. For India also possessed a common civilisation. From the days of the Aryan invasion a way of life and thought called Hinduism had gradually spread all over India. It was at once more elastic and more rigid than that which Christianity and Hellenism had given Europe. As a religion, Hinduism readily absorbed the local deities of India into its crowded pantheon. Buddhism, which grew out of it, became too strong to be absorbed, but it was gradually overshadowed and ultimately faded out. Sikhism, another outgrowth, a kind of Hindu Puritanism, has retained its strength and identity, but its adherents, mostly located in north-west India, number less than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. of the total population to-day. Hinduism embraces over 65 per cent., and it is more than a religion. It is a complete and a very rigid pattern of social life. Its sacred law prescribes what men must do and must not do in most of the daily round. In particular it imposes on them a unique caste-system which, though its rules are no longer so unbreakable as once they were, still holds the vast mass of Hindus in its grip and defies the intrusive forces of Western thought. To the outside observer it seems an astonishing survival from an age which cared nothing for the freedom of the individual. For a Hindu may never leave the caste—and that may also mean the occupation—into which he was born. He cannot marry a member of another caste, nor, if the custom of his caste forbids it, may he even eat or drink with him. Within each caste there is a genuine solidarity, a recognition of common interest, a tradition of mutual help; but the general effect is narrowing and disruptive. It is caste that mainly accounts for the fact that the growth in India of the roots of democracy as understood in the Western world has been so slow and constricted. The class structure of the West, it is true, may be described as a kind of caste-system; but it is incomparably less rigid, and it has not cramped, to anything like the same extent, the steady growth of the sense of Society and the State.

Western students of Indian life do not regard their own civilisation as unblemished, and they are well aware that Hindu India has been the home of a rich and varied culture and that Hindu moralists and poets and artists have made an immortal contribution to the common treasury of mankind. But they cannot honestly evade or minimise the backward side of Hinduism, and

there are two other elements in it besides caste which, because of their political implications, cannot be ignored in a study of India's political development. The first is the inferior status which Hinduism accords to women. Its most obvious feature to-day is the seclusion of women from contact with men outside the family. Its most startling feature in the past—startling to Western minds at least—was the religious rite of *suttee* in observance of which the Hindu widow, often by an act of heroic devotion, but often under duress, immolated herself on her husband's funeral pyre.<sup>1</sup> Another manifestation of it was the practice of female infanticide.<sup>2</sup>

The second feature of Hinduism which clashes with Western thought is its treatment of the lowest castes, loosely called 'out-castes', who are believed to be mostly descended from the aboriginal races of India and now number about 50 millions or roughly one-eighth of the total Indian population. Their official name has recently been changed to 'Scheduled Castes', but they used to be called, more informatively, 'Depressed Classes' and were popularly known as 'untouchables'. They rank far below and almost outside the caste-system, and they constitute a proletariat in the harshest sense of the word. An orthodox caste-Hindu must bathe at once if he has been touched by one of them. In some parts of India the outcaste may not enter a Hindu temple: he may not draw water from the village well: his children may not attend the village school.

Hindu social reformers, it need hardly be said, have long been demanding a more liberal recognition of the rights of women and of outcastes as well as a relaxation of the caste-system as a whole. Great progress has certainly been made in the course of the last generation. A visitor from the West might move in cultivated Hindu circles, especially among younger folk, and be virtually unaware of caste. He would find his hosts talking the same sort of democratic language that he talks himself at home. But the intelligentsia constitute less than one-tenth of the people, and the vast majority of Hindus are uneducated peasant-folk, living in their countless little villages a life which still follows the ancient rules and has not as yet been deeply affected by the ideas of the outer world. It will take time for this static and conservative society to become democratic in the sense or to the extent that the West is democratic.

<sup>1</sup> See E. Thompson, *Suttee* (London, 1928).      <sup>2</sup> See p. 290 below.

## 2. THE EXPANSION OF ISLAM

In the course of the eighth century A.D. both Europe and India began to feel the impact of one of the forces which have done most to shape the course of modern history. Breaking out from the birthplace of their new Moslem faith in the Arabian desert, the Arabs launched themselves on a career of conquest which carried them with astonishing rapidity into the heart of the surrounding world. Within a few decades they had brought the whole of the Middle East—Irak, Persia, Syria, Egypt—under the rule of Islam and then, streaming along the north coast of Africa to the Atlantic, had poured, with their converted Berber allies, into Spain. They even penetrated into France, but were thrown back across the Pyrenees in A.D. 732. There they remained—masters of most of Spain, creators of a culture unequalled elsewhere in the Europe of the time, intermediaries between East and West, conveying through the Arabic texts the rediscovery of Hellenism which revitalised European civilisation—till, in the eleventh century, the Christians began to renew their hold on the country. By 1200 the 'Moriscos' had become a subject people. In 1610 the last remnants of them were expelled from Spain.

At the other end of Europe Moslem conquest was slower to begin, but it proved more retentive in the end. For several centuries the Arabs and their successors as the swordsmen of Islam, the Turks, were checked by the survival of the Eastern branch of the Roman Empire at Constantinople and by the series of Christian counter-offensives known as the Crusades. It was not till about the time of the Norman conquest of England that the Turks reached the narrow waters which separate the continents. It was not till the fourteenth century that they invaded Balkan Europe. But thereafter they made steady progress. In 1365 they were in Adrianople. In 1453 they stormed Constantinople. A few years later they were on the Danube. They besieged but never took Vienna. Over part of Hungary, however, and all Bessarabia and Moldavia the Turkish Empire steadily expanded; and, mainly owing to the jealous dissensions of the Great Powers, it remained entrenched in the Balkans till far into the nineteenth century. Constantinople and a substantial area round it are still in Turkish hands; but Turkish rule has now ceased to mean Moslem rule, for the new Turkish Republic has been secularised and no longer accepts Islam as a theocratic system of government. Eastwards the expansion of Islam was no less spectacular. It spread through Central Asia, through Turkestan to the outlying provinces of

China, through Northern India, and, striking out south-east by sea, it overran Malaya and the East Indian archipelago. In all that vast area Islam is still a living and compelling faith.

Easy of approach along the coast of the Arabian Sea, Sind was the first part of India to be submerged by this eastward-flowing tide. It was conquered by the Arabs early in the eighth century, and the great majority of its people have remained Moslems ever since. Between A.D. 1000 and A.D. 1500 a succession of Turkish and Afghan soldiers of fortune—Mahmud of Ghazni was the first—broke through the mountains in the north-west and drove right across the great northern plain to the delta of the Ganges. They also crossed the Vindhya and in the course of several wars four Moslem States were carved out from the old Hindu kingdoms of the Deccan. The armies of these invaders were never very large, and their success was only partly due to superiority in equipment and the art of war. The main reason why the Moslems so easily obtained their hold in India was the failure of the Hindu kingdoms to combine against them. In the Middle Ages, at any rate, Christian Europe did better in this respect. French troops crossed the Pyrenees to help the Spaniards. The Crusades, despite their undercurrents of intrigue and greed, were a genuine manifestation of the unity of Western Christendom.

The area in which Moslem rule was strongest continued to be the area most open to invasion—the Indus basin and the Ganges plain. Delhi was early chosen for its capital, and there for five centuries a series of Turkish and Afghan monarchs reigned, till, in 1525, the greatest, though not the last, of the Moslem invaders rode through the passes from Kabul. Babur, half Turk, half Mongol, directly descended from the great conqueror Timur (Tamurlane), descended into north-west India with only some 10,000 fighting men; but he had been invited into the Punjab by its Moslem governor in rebellion against Delhi; and the Rajputs, a loose confederacy of Hindu warrior chieftains who had maintained their independence in the fastnesses of the rocky country now known as Rajputana, had promised him their support. The issue was decided in two battles. The rout of the Delhi army at Panipat in 1526 gave Babur the mastery of the northern plain. At Khanua in 1527 the Rajputs, who had turned against him, were no less crushingly defeated. No other formidable enemies stood in Babur's path. The Hindu South was still incapable of forming a common front against the danger in the North. There was little, therefore, to prevent the firm establishment at Delhi of the dynasty of Moslem monarchs who

created and for two centuries maintained the famous 'Mogul Empire'.

Previous Moslem invaders from Afghanistan had treated northern India first as a rich field for raiding and looting and then as an outlying dependency of Kabul. But under the five able rulers who succeeded Babur the position was rapidly reversed. The Moguls were Emperors of India. Their capital was Delhi, not Kabul. Afghanistan, though still under Mogul rule, was now the outlying and relatively unimportant province until, when the Empire began to disintegrate, it broke away and became the separate country it has since remained. The Moguls, in fact, concluded and confirmed an historic process which was to affect the destiny of India more than anything else that had happened since its history began. Its Moslem invaders had come to stay and had identified themselves with their new home. They had ceased to be primarily Turks and Afghans: they had become Indians. And they gave the word 'India' a new meaning by pushing their conquests eastwards to the borders of Assam and southwards to the River Kaveri. If the time was yet far off when the Indian peoples would be able so to know and understand each other as to feel themselves the children of a single motherland, in the eyes of the outer world India was now, to all intents and purposes, a single political unit. The first European contact with India coincided, as will be seen, with the beginning of Mogul rule. At most earlier periods the new-comers would have been confronted with a multiplicity of independent and warring kingdoms. Now they found that, save in the south, all India was one state or at least one body of united states. To obtain permission to trade therein was a relatively simple matter. The Emperor at Delhi would decide.

It would be false, however, to suppose that an India thus united was an India wholly free from war. There was no unbroken 'Moslem Peace'. Before Babur came, the Moslem kings, like their Hindu predecessors, had constantly fought one another; and after Babur they still fought from time to time in defiance of their overlord or in open rebellion against him. Raiding armies, too, continued from time to time to penetrate into the Punjab. Since, moreover, the succession to the imperial throne was not determined by rule of primogeniture, the death of its occupant was nearly always followed not only by murders in the family circle but also by civil war. The breakdown of Jehangir's health occasioned three years of fighting during which the whole Empire was in confusion. And these conflicts involved Hindus as well as

Moslems. The Rajputs, for example, as notorious for their internal feuds as for their courage in battle, fought one another in the service of rival Moslem overlords.

Nevertheless, if the unity of India under the Moguls was far from perfect, there was more of it than there had ever been since the distant days of the great Hindu empires. And it was reflected in an efficient system of bureaucratic organisation. The Empire was divided into fifteen Provinces (including the Afghan Province) each under its Governor. Each large city also had its more or less autocratic ruler. Justice was certainly purer than in earlier times, but, except in matters of purely religious law, the executive authority shared in and at need controlled its administration. For the mass of the people the most beneficent reform was the replacement of irregular and often arbitrary taxation by an elaborate land-revenue system. Under Akbar the individual cultivator was required to pay one-third of the average annual value of his produce. There is no record of agrarian disturbance in this period, and in the years of strife and misrule which followed the breakdown of the Empire the Indian peasantry looked back to the reign of Akbar as a golden age.

It was also an age of cultural renaissance. The plain of the Ganges was studded with Moslem mosques and tombs which rivalled in beauty the more ornamental Hindu temples of the South. In other arts, whereas Hindu culture, like the Hindu faith, had always been rooted in India, the Moguls invited artists and poets and philosophers from other Moslem lands. Exquisite painting was done in the Persian style, and Persian poetry became the vogue in court circles. All in all, the Mogul age was the greatest age that India had known in modern history, and more than any other it made life tolerable for the Indian people. But its boons were bought at a price. For it was in the Mogul period that northern India was finally submerged in the tide of Moslem conquest which had ebbed and flowed for centuries past; and it was the greatness of the Mogul emperors that planted in the minds of Indian Moslems the conviction that, while they now belonged to India, India now belonged to them.

### 3. THE MOSLEMS IN INDIA

Like Hinduism, Islam is more than a system of religious worship. Like Hinduism, it is a rule of life laid down by a sacred law. But no two philosophies of thought and conduct could be more



discordant. On the religious side Islam, sprung from the bare, hard, unchanging desert, is sternly monotheistic: Hinduism, cradled in a varied land of rivers and forests, embraces many gods. Islam regards an attempt to represent the deity in material form as a heinous sin; Hinduism, like Christianity, finds therein one of the chief inspirations of its art. The simple mosque, unadorned save by texts from the Koran, confronts the intricate design and luxuriant sculpture of the temple. On the social side, Islam proclaims the equal brotherhood of all believers, and, save for such commands as abstinence from intoxicants, it leaves them free, Hinduism separates and binds its followers with the chains of caste. Those are the basic differences, but there is much else that keeps the communities apart and provokes their antagonism. Inter-marriage is forbidden by both creeds, and a Hindu may not even share a meal with a Moslem. Moslems eat beef: Hindus venerate the cow. Moslem culture, which seems relatively bleak and sterile to Hindus, springs from sources outside India: its classical languages are Arabic and Persian: the distinctive common speech of Moslems in North India outside Bengal is Urdu. Hindu culture, which is regarded by Moslems as at once too intellectual and too sensuous, is rooted in Indian soil: its classical language is Sanskrit, its major common speech is Hindi. One other point of difference must be stressed because of its political implications. There are not many Hindus living outside India, but Indian Moslems belong to a fraternity whose habitation stretches north-east and south-east over the Chinese frontier and into the island world of Malaysia and west across the Middle East to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic. It may be said in short that these two great religious systems make contact only at one point. At the heart of them both there lies a fatalism more sombre and pervasive than any of the pessimistic philosophies that have so far darkened the outlook of the Western world.

In its opening stages Moslem conquest was a missionary enterprise. The soldiers of the Prophet were fighting a *jihad*, a religious war, against the infidel; and it was long the rule that, unless they were Jews or Christians, the 'People of the Book', the conquered had to choose between conversion and the sword. This rule was probably applied in the earlier invasions of India, but, as time went on, it became customary to permit Hindus to keep their faith provided that they paid the *jizya*, a special tax imposed on all non-Moslems in addition to other taxation. In the Mogul period even Hindu princes or chiefs—the Rajputs, for example—were

allowed to retain the rulership of their territories if they submitted to the paramountcy of the Emperor and gave him a quota of their revenues. This softening of the old relentless temper meant that Hinduism was not forcibly deleted from those parts of India which were swept by Moslem armies. It remained, and still remains, the faith of a substantial majority of Indians.<sup>1</sup> But the fact that conversions were not enforced did not mean that they were few and far between. The Indian Moslems would not number now nearly one-quarter of the total population if they were all descended from the relatively small numbers of invaders who came from beyond the border. In Bengal, in particular, there must have been conversion *en masse*, whether under compulsion or, as has been suggested, because most of the Bengalis of that day belonged to low and feebly Hinduised castes. And there were obvious inducements to individuals to change their faith and so at a stroke to take rank with the ruling rather than the subject class. In any case, whether forced or voluntary, large-scale conversion meant not only that the Moslem community in India became more numerous than it would otherwise have been, but also that it was not a community of foreigners. Its differences in other respects with the Hindus have not been enhanced by a difference in race. Except in the neighbourhood of the north-west frontier, the vast majority of Indian Moslems are the progeny of folk who lived in India before Islam was born.

If the rigours of Moslem conquest were tempered in its later stages, they were brutal enough at first. Many pages of the records almost reek with slaughter. The ground is carpeted with corpses, and the rivers flow with blood. The punishment of captured enemies or rebels was often terrible—impalement, flaying alive, trampling by elephants, blinding. And as painful, perhaps, as the conquerors' cruelty and more persistent were the scorn and hate they showed for the religion of the conquered. The lives of Hindus might be spared, but not the symbols of their idolatry. A fury of iconoclasm descended on the Hindu shrines of northern India; and, except in the middle phase of the Mogul Empire, illumined by Akbar's wisdom, this deliberate desecration of Hindu holy places, this wanton humiliation of Hindu pride, continued when massacre and torture had ceased. Mahmud of Ghazni, first Moslem invader of the North, sacked Somnath and smashed in pieces the famous image it contained. Aurangzeb, last of the great Moguls, built on the site of a demolished shrine at Benares a mosque whose minarets

<sup>1</sup> For statistics of the population at the census of 1941, see p. 301 below.

still tower above the clustered temples of the sacred Hindu city. From first to last such acts were numberless, and the wounds they inflicted went deep. Does every visitor to India nowadays appreciate the significance of the Kutb Minar, the column of victory which far out-tops the many monuments of Delhi and was built with the stones of the ruined temple at its foot?

Only one of the Moguls, the greatest of them, seems to have recognised the gravity of the problem which the Moslem conquest had created and which has haunted the life of India ever since. To Akbar, at any rate, it was plain that the perpetuation, still more the aggravation, of the Hindu-Moslem schism would prove fatal sooner or later to the peace and welfare of his vast dominions, and that no Raj (rule) could long endure which degraded, penalised, and humiliated the majority of its subjects. He tried, accordingly, to narrow the gulf by setting Moslems and Hindus as far as possible on an equal political and social footing. He abolished the *jizya*. He treated his Hindu vassal princes like his Moslem provincial governors. He promoted Hindu soldiers and officials to high posts in the imperial service. He set an example in personal intercourse: the mother of his son, Jehangir, was a Hindu princess. His final attempt to solve the Hindu-Moslem problem was still bolder and more drastic. Like Christian evangelists of a later day, he hoped that Hindus and Moslems could be brought together in the fold of a new faith, and, to the scandal of most Moslems, he propagated a new religion with himself as its prophet and interpreter. The experiment failed. Hindus, no more than Moslems, were prepared for such a spiritual and social revolution. And, while Akbar's first two successors, neither of them a zealous Moslem, more or less maintained the policy of toleration, the third, Aurangzeb, reversed it. He was not, it seems, cruel by nature, but he was a bigot who sincerely believed that he was obliged to do what he did by the inexorable dictates of a sacred law which applied as strictly to public as to private life. He reimposed the *jizya* and differentiated the customs duties in favour of Moslems. As time went on, he deprived Hindus of all high rank in the administration. His attempt to exclude them altogether from the department of finance was only thwarted by his inability to fill their places with Moslems. He demonstrated with a cold ferocity his hatred of the Hindu faith. The practice of desecrating and destroying temples was revived. Hindu festivals and religious fairs were prohibited or curtailed.

The upshot was inevitable. India was soon seething with discontent. Most of the Rajput chiefs broke away from their

allegiance, and the imperial army lost its best material, the Rajput soldier. Down in the South, the Marathas began the great revolt which was to do most in the end to bring the Mogul Empire down. For the whole of the second half of his fifty years' reign Aurangzeb was grappling with rebellion in the Deccan. When he died in 1707, the great imperial structure, which had held nearly all India within its framework for the best part of two centuries, was plainly about to collapse.

#### 4. EUROPE IN THE MOGUL AGE

In Europe, as in India, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a period of constant war; and after 1517, when, a few years before Babur invaded India, the Reformation may be said to have begun, the wars tended to become wars of religion. The devastating Thirty Years War (1618-48) was fought between Catholic and Protestant powers. And in several of its manifestations the schism of Western Christendom might seem comparable with the schism between Hinduism and Islam in India. Catholic and Protestant rulers alike treated their subjects of the other communion with the harshest severity. The tortures of the Spanish Inquisition were as cruel as anything which Hindus suffered at the hands of Moslems. Queen Elizabeth's reign (1558-1603) coincided almost exactly with Akbar's (1556-1605): she was more tolerant than her predecessor, but men were still put to death for their opinions in her day. In France in that same period religious strife was more incessant and more bloody. The Massacre of St. Bartholomew was perpetrated in 1572. But in the time of Aurangzeb (1658-1707), in most of western Europe, the age of toleration was dawning. There were exceptions, of course, and one of them is a blot on English history. Cromwell's bigotry in Ireland was as reckless as Aurangzeb's in India, and long after Aurangzeb was dead the penal laws subjected Catholics in Ireland—and to a less extent in England too—not only to restrictions on the practice of their religion but also to an inferior civic status not so very different from Aurangzeb's degradation of Hindus. If Hindus in the latter part of his reign could hold no high public office, Catholics in Britain and Ireland could hold no public office at all till 1829. Yet, when all is said, it is the contrast between the schism in Europe and the schism in India that strikes the historian, not the similarity. To make the two pictures correspond one must imagine that the Moslem invasion of Europe had not been checked at the Pyrenees and the

Bosphorus, that the whole continent, except, say, Scandinavia, had come under a Moslem Emperor's control, that its Christian peoples had become subject peoples, and that many of them had been converted to Islam. Even so the schism would not have cut so deep. For, as has already been intimated, Islam is far more antagonistic to Hinduism than it is to Christianity. Still narrower was the actual breach between two branches of one Christendom in Europe.

There is another important point of contrast. In India under the Moguls, while there were changes in the administrative system, there was no change in the principle of government. Except in the settlement of village disputes by committees of elders (*panchayats*) and possibly also in a measure of representative government in some of the early Hindu kingdoms, India had never developed such free institutions as existed in medieval Europe; and under the Moguls, as under their predecessors, the traditional despotism was tempered only by the practice of the *darbar*—the daily audience at which the despot listened to his subjects' prayers and petitions. In Europe in this period, on the other hand, the principles of absolutism and freedom came into open conflict. Over most of the continent the emergence of the national State and the creation of standing armies enabled absolutism to repress local liberties and attain a power and efficiency hitherto unknown. But freedom held its ground—in Switzerland, in the Netherlands, in England. It was in this period that the Mother of Parliaments came of age. Elizabeth was obliged to woo her Parliaments. Charles I fought his and so lost his life. If William III retained prerogatives which the Crown has now long lost, the foundations of the parliamentary government of to-day were firmly laid by the Revolution of 1688. And this historic struggle was not domestic only. To preserve her own freedom England was forced to become the champion of freedom in Europe; and she did more than any other country to prevent the monarchies of Spain and France from imposing an absolutist 'order' on the greater part of the continent.

There is a third point of contrast. The cultural life of Mogul India, rich as it was in some respects, was not to be compared with the astonishing effluence of thought and art, of inventiveness and enterprise in Europe in those days. It was the golden springtide of the modern Western world. It was the age of Michelangelo, Raphael, Dürer, Rembrandt and Velasquez, of Descartes, Spinoza and Leibnitz, of Machiavelli and Grotius, of Erasmus, Montaigne,

Cervantes, Molière, and Pascal, of Copernicus and Galileo, to name only a few of the lights that illumined Europe. In England alone it was the age of Shakespeare and Milton, of Hobbes and Locke, of Harvey and Newton and Wren. And it was an age of no less remarkable development in more material things—in the management of money, for example, and the organisation of trade. Europe, in fact, was developing an immense dynamic force at a time when Indian society was static. That in itself made it probable that, if contact were established between Europe and India and it came to a trial of strength between them, Europe would prevail.

That contact was in fact established in this period was no accident: for one of the natural manifestations of the new age in Europe was the opening of the seas and the beginning of that momentous chapter of modern history—the outflow of the Europeans along the sea-ways of the world. And the first objective of the great explorers was, as it happened, to find a sailing route to the Indies. On that quest, thirty-three years before Babur invaded India, Columbus ran into America. On the same quest, five years later, da Gama rounded the Cape.

The Indians—and this is the last point of contrast—had never developed sea-power. The Arabs were great sailors. Before the coming of the Portuguese their fleets had commanded the Indian Ocean for centuries. But the Indians, though since the dawn of history their merchant ships had ventured over all the eastern seas between Mozambique and Canton and their traders had settled all along the coasts, had never tried, it seems, except perhaps in the Buddhist age, to obtain the naval strength which was to determine so much of the world's history. Thus the shores of India lay unprotected on the water from the intrusion of Europe. The Portuguese and their successors, the Dutch, the English and the French, had to fight one another, but not Indians, for the mastery of the Indian seas.

## II

# The Beginnings of British Rule

### I. THE EUROPEAN INTRUSION

THE opening of the seas began the process—so amazingly accelerated by the triumphs of science in our own day—of conquering distance and bringing the peoples of the world into neighbourhood. Henceforward the relationships between them were to be more than international: they were to become increasingly intercontinental and interracial. In due course all the continents and races became linked in one complex of world-trade and world-power.

The pioneers of European enterprise in India sought both trade and power. The Portuguese were not content to divert into their sea-route the stream of Eastern traffic which had hitherto flowed overland to the Mediterranean and so to make Lisbon the distributing centre which Genoa and Venice once had been. They wanted to monopolise the trade and to exclude from it not only European rivals but Indians too. To that end the great Albuquerque created a Portuguese empire of the Indian Ocean. Its capital was fixed at Goa. Its outlying strongholds were built at Malacca, Colombo, Hormuz, and Mozambique, commanding the ocean entrances and exits to east and west and south. When Albuquerque died at Goa in 1515, the only strategic point he had failed to capture was Aden. 'I leave the chief place in India in Your Majesty's power,' he wrote in his last letter to his sovereign, 'the only thing left to be done being the closing of the gates of the Straits.'

Europe had nothing like the unity which the Moguls had imposed on India, and the Portuguese hold on the Indian Ocean was soon contested by the Dutch. By attempting at the same time to occupy Brazil and control the Eastern seas, Portugal had overtaxed her strength, and the Dutch had little difficulty in seizing the key-points of sea-power. They dominated the Persian Gulf and took Colombo and Malacca. Goa alone survived and remains to-day a little enclave of Portuguese rule. Masters of the sea, the Dutch supplanted the Portuguese monopoly of trade with a monopoly of their own. Its main field was not India but the Malayan archipelago: its headquarters were at Batavia. How ruthlessly the Dutch were determined to resist the intrusion of European competitors into this preserve was shown by

the notorious 'massacre' of English merchants at Amboyna in 1623.

The English, who had entered the field with the foundation of the East India Company in 1600, pursued from the outset a different policy. The business-men of London believed that great profits could be made from a reasonable share in Indian trade without attempting to establish a monopoly. The former would only require protection from attack at sea. The latter would involve the annexation and garrisoning of strategic posts and the heavy cost of constant fighting. All that was needed for business purposes, it was held, was for English merchants to obtain similar 'capitulations' from the Mogul Emperor to those they had been accustomed to obtain from the Ottoman Sultan of Turkey in the Levant, i.e. permission to make commercial settlements, known as 'factories', and to administer these townships under their own laws. The wise Sir Thomas Roe, who went with this object as James I's ambassador to Jehangir's court at Delhi in 1615,<sup>1</sup> besought the Company to avoid the mistake of the Portuguese and the Dutch 'who seek plantation here by the sword'. 'Let this be received as a rule that, if you will profit, seek it at sea and in quiet trade; for without controversy it is an error to affect garrisons and land wars in India.'<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the following hundred years or so this rule was broken only once. Towards the end of the seventeenth century the control of the Company fell into the hands of Sir Josia Child, a masterful City magnate, who observed, prophetically but prematurely, that events were 'forming us into the condition of a sovereign State in India' and declared that the Company ought forthwith to lay 'the foundations of a large, well-grounded, sure English dominion in India for all time to come'.<sup>2</sup> With that object, in 1686, he made a dispute over customs duties in Bengal into an excuse for a declaration of war by the Company on the Mogul Empire, and dispatched ten ships and six hundred men to reduce Aurangzeb to submission. This airy essay in imperialism had the result it deserved. The English merchants were forced to evacuate their settlements in Bengal and so lost at a stroke the fruits of all their labours for the past fifty years. It was only the Company's command of the Indian Ocean and its interruption of the Moslem

<sup>1</sup> *The Embassy of Sir Thomas Roe*, ed. W. Foster (London, 1899), ii. p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> Dispatch of 28 September 1687, quoted by E. Thompson and G. T. Garratt, *Rise and Fulfilment of British Rule in India* (London, 1934), p. 42.



pilgrim traffic to Mecca that induced Aurangzeb in 1690 to listen to overtures of peace. His terms were those of a victor. Licence to trade would again be conceded to the English, but they must pay a fine of £17,000, they must expel their chief agent (Josia Child's namesake, John Child, who happened to die just at this time) from India, and they must undertake 'to behave themselves for the future no more in such a shameful manner'.<sup>1</sup> The episode thus ended had at least been instructive. The exception had proved the rule, and the Company reverted to 'quiet trade'. If its agents fortified their chief settlements at Madras, Calcutta and Bombay, maintained a small force of English soldiers, and raised and drilled a few companies of Indian 'sepoys', it was not with any design of conquest or territorial expansion but only to protect the settlements from the pirates and marauding bands which Mogul rule could not entirely repress and from the danger of a sudden extension to Indian waters of an outbreak of war in Europe. The municipal government of the settlements by Presidents and Councils was businesslike; law and order were firmly maintained within their bounds; and, when from the end of the seventeenth century onwards the storms which heralded the fall of the Mogul Empire began to break all over India, the townships became little havens of peace and security in which Indian merchants could take refuge and grow rich.

Taken as a whole, this long period of 'quiet trade' was unquestionably beneficial to all parties concerned. India imported a variety of things from Europe, above all the silver she needed to fertilise her internal trade. England obtained indigo, calico, yarn, saltpetre, sugar. And, since these goods were sold for much more than they cost, the Company's shareholders drew high dividends. The Indian trade, indeed, was a substantial factor in the building-up of that financial strength which was presently to enable Britain to outlast the long struggle with Napoleon.

It was the rise of the Marathas, the sturdy folk of the Maharashtra, the uplands east and south-east of Bombay, that did most to bring the Mogul Empire down. As early as 1650 their allegiance to Delhi had become little more than nominal, and they were soon freely indulging in their practice of making good the agricultural poverty of their own lands by raiding those of their neighbours. An English report in 1662 described 'the whole country' southwards from the Gulf of Cambay as 'a mere field of

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 45: P. E. Roberts, *Historical Geography of India* (Oxford, 1916.)

1. pp. 45-6.

blood'.<sup>1</sup> In 1674 Sivaji, the hero of Maratha history, whom Aurungzeb called 'the mountain rat' and the English merchants, more sympathetically, 'that grand rebel, Sevagee',<sup>2</sup> assumed the crown of an independent kingdom which included all the highlands and much of the maritime plain from the neighbourhood of Bombay to that of Goa with outlying military posts in Mysore and Madras. Aurangzeb failed to crush Sivaji. He was more successful with his incompetent son and successor whom, aided by dissension in the Maratha ranks, he captured and tortured to death. But he could not conquer Maharashtra. One stronghold after another was besieged and taken, only to be lost again. And after Aurangzeb's death the Maratha raiders swept almost unchecked through the heart of India. Nor did they maintain the discipline which Sivaji had imposed, especially in the treatment of women. 'They slay the unarmed, the poor, women and children,' wrote an Indian contemporary of the raiders in Bengal. 'They rob all property and abduct chaste wives.'<sup>3</sup>

It was only the growth of the British Raj, it has been said, that prevented the Marathas from taking the place of the Moguls as the controlling and unifying power in all India; but it must be a matter of speculation whether in the long run they could have resisted the pressure of invasion by the old north-west route. One of the symptoms of Mogul collapse was the recurrence of that perennial danger. In 1738-9 Nadir Shah, ruler of Persia, invaded and annexed the Punjab and seized Delhi itself. For the whole of a day the city was given up to massacre and arson. In 1748, 1749, and 1752 Ahmad Shah Abdali, ruler of Afghanistan, invaded the Punjab. In 1754 he took and plundered Delhi, and in 1761 he met a great Maratha army on the historic battlefield of Panipat and routed it with such overwhelming slaughter—the death-roll of combatants and camp-followers has been reckoned at nearly 200,000—that the power of the Marathas was completely broken for at least a generation.

Meanwhile India was drifting into chaos. The successors of Aurangzeb were still accorded the formalities of their imperial rank, but the scope of their real authority was confined to a steadily shrinking area round Delhi. Their Moslem viceroys became independent monarchs. Chief of these in the Deccan was the Nizam of Hyderabad, as he and his successors in the dynasty he

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Moreland and Chatterjee, *History of India* (London, 1936), p. 269.

founded were henceforward to be known. In Bengal and Bihar, in Oudh and in the northern part of the Carnatic, similarly, the Mogul Nawabs—anglicised as ‘Nabobs’ and previously meaning no more than deputies—established independent autocratic States. Nor was it only Moslems who shared the heritage of Mogul power. In the south, in Mysore and Travancore, for example, Hindu kingdoms were restored. In the west the Marathas were free to rebuild their shattered strength. North of them the independence of the Rajput chiefs was now unqualified and for a time unthreatened. Northwards again the Sikhs under Ranjit Singh shook off their Afghan rulers and created an independent Punjab. And round and about these larger units a multitude of smaller principalities were taking shape. All such political unity as India had possessed was dissolving, and everywhere the local magnates, heads of old tribal or caste communities or ambitious upstarts and soldiers of fortune, were scrambling for territory and power. Legal prescription was no longer valid. Everywhere might was right. Nor was the scramble confined to the bigger men. No landlord was so petty that he would not try to take advantage of the general confusion to enlarge his estate. The only folk who had nothing to gain and everything to lose were the great mass of the Indian people. Such security as the peasantry had once enjoyed was gone. The framework of law and order had collapsed, and the constantly changing pattern of power meant nothing to them except that new rulers took up, where old rulers had left off, the task of wringing from their poverty the last dribble of taxation. Perhaps the strangest of all the legends which sometimes pass for history nowadays is that which depicts India on the eve of the British Raj as prosperous and happy. In fact it was a period of greater misery than anything that Europe had experienced since the Dark Ages, not excluding the horrors of the Thirty Years War.

The British merchants could still do business, but they could no longer depend on the imperial licence and authority for the safety of their settlements and their trading rights. With anarchy all round them they were thrown back on their own resources. They strengthened their fortifications. They enrolled more sepoys. But these were purely defensive moves: they did not want to join in the fighting; they wanted to keep out of it and wait for better times. In 1750 they still hoped to observe the rule they had broken only once since Roe laid it down in 1618.

## 2. BRITAIN VERSUS FRANCE IN INDIA

The origin of the British Raj is to be found in the fact that in the course of the eighteenth century India became involved in what corresponded in those days to a 'world war'. It was a century of persistent conflict between parliamentary Britain and absolutist and revolutionary France; and the battlefields were not only in the West, in Europe and North America and on the Atlantic, but also in the East, in Egypt and Syria, on the Indian Ocean and in India.

The French had come late into the field of Indian trade. Their East India Company was not founded till 1664: it never paid its way, and it was dissolved in 1769. But, though it failed to obtain as firm a hold on Indian soil as its British rival, it succeeded in establishing similar commercial settlements at Pondicherry and a few other points on the coast and in Bengal. If the French position was weaker than the British on land, it was strategically stronger on sea. Britain had not yet obtained a territorial foothold on the long sea-route from Europe nearer to India than St. Helena, but in Île de France (now Mauritius) the French possessed a first-rate naval base in the heart of the Indian Ocean. It could be used not only for preying on British merchant shipping but also for attacking the British settlements in India. Thus, at the outset of the war of 1744-8, La Bourdonnais, sailing from Port Louis and evading the ill-commanded British fleet, succeeded in capturing Madras.

Madras was restored at the peace of 1748, but meantime another able Frenchman was planning another kind of attack on the British position in India. Dupleix, Governor of Pondicherry from 1742 to 1754, had conceived, like Child before him, the idea of 'dominion' in India, and, owing to the collapse of the Mogul Empire, it was a more practicable idea in his day than in Child's. All that seemed necessary to begin with was to obtain ascendancy over the local despots of Southern India. With their aid the British could be expelled from the Carnatic and French power steadily extended northwards. The first step in the execution of this design was successful. Dupleix intervened in a dispute occasioned by the death of the ruler of Hyderabad, put his candidate on the throne, and so brought the State under his control. But when he tried the same game in the Carnatic, he found that the British had taken a hand and were backing their protégé against his. The result was open war between the Companies in India while their Governments were at peace in Europe. That it went

against the French was mainly due to the accident that one of the British Company's young clerks at Madras, Robert Clive, 25 years old in 1750, was a born soldier—the greatest British soldier, it has been thought, since Marlborough. In 1754 the French Company, convinced that nothing was to be gained by further fighting, came to terms with the British and recalled Dupleix.

The conflict provoked by Dupleix in the south had its repercussions in the north. In 1756 Siraj-ud-Daula, the young Moslem Nawab of Bengal, observing the new military activities of the two European Companies and fearing that his dominions might become another of their battlefields, suddenly descended on Calcutta. Some of its British defenders fled. The rest were captured, and, being imprisoned in a small room in torrid heat, most of them died of suffocation.<sup>1</sup> The British authorities at Madras reacted quickly. An amphibious expedition, with Clive in command of the troops, promptly recovered Calcutta. In 1757, applying the new technique, the British took up the cause of Mir Jafar, a claimant to the throne; and Clive, with a force of some 3,000 men, attacked and routed Siraj-ud-Daula's ill-disciplined host at Plassey—a battle which deserves its fame because, though not much more than a skirmish in itself, it made the British masters of Bengal. There was no formal annexation. Mir Jafar was installed as Nawab and the shadowy suzerainty of the Mogul Emperor recognised. But in fact the British, with Clive as Governor, controlled the government. Before long the office of Nawab became merely titular, and it was ultimately abolished and its occupant pensioned off. In Madras and the Northern Circars, similarly, the Indian rulers gradually faded out. But it was not till 1813, when the sovereignty of the British Crown, hitherto recognised only in the island of Bombay, was declared by Act of Parliament to cover all the Company's territorial possessions that, in form as well as in fact, the British Raj began.

The growth of the Company's power had brought about a radical change in its character. It was still a business concern, but it was now much more than that. It was virtually governing an area of India as large as the British Isles. It had secured a share in the territorial heritage of the Mogul Empire, and thenceforward it ranked with its other heirs as one of the so-called 'country powers',

<sup>1</sup> There is no reason to suppose that this was an act of deliberate cruelty, but the recent suggestions of Moslem nationalists that the story of the Black Hole is a complete fabrication cannot be substantiated. The documentary evidence is genuine and decisive.

and as such it was inevitably involved in the general complex of intrigue and strife. Its small but well-disciplined army was more than a match for those of its rivals provided that it met them singly. Thus, when the Nawab of Oudh rashly challenged its authority in Bengal, the lesson of Plassey was repeated at Buxar (1764). Oudh was not annexed, but it was obliged to become a dependent ally of the Company and to act as a protective buffer-state against possible danger from the north-west. Of the other 'powers' three were of major importance—the Marathas, who were now recovering from the catastrophe of Panipat and had substituted a loose confederacy for Sivaji's kingdom; Haidar Ali, a Moslem adventurer, who had usurped the throne of the old Hindu dynasty in Mysore and made it into a powerful and aggressive military state; and the Nizam of Hyderabad, who maintained an uneasy balance between his two stronger neighbours on one side and the Company on the other. The situation of the Company, controlling three widely separate areas and depending on constant reinforcement and supply from a faraway base in Europe, was bound to be precarious if those three 'powers', acting in concert and on interior strategic lines, should make a united and sustained attack.

Nor was the new British Raj in danger only from Indians. It was still in danger from the French. In the Seven Years War (1756–63), it is true, the British, aided as in Canada by their command of the sea, won a decisive victory at Wandewash (1760). But the peace, as before, was only a truce, since the French were determined to try to recover what they had lost, both in the east and in the west, at the first favourable opportunity. They continued, therefore, to play a part in Indian politics; and it was with the connivance of French agents at Indian courts and French commanders and instructors of Indian troops, that in 1779, when Britain had become enmeshed in the disastrous War of American Independence, a combination of the three 'powers' of the Deccan was at last brought about. The Marathas, who had previously been engaged in indecisive fighting with Bombay, leagued themselves with Haidar Ali and the Nizam, and a series of simultaneous attacks were planned on all the Company's territories. Never again till 1941–2 was the British footing in India so precarious. For, at the moment of greatest danger on land, they lost, as in 1941–2, the command of the sea. In 1780, the 'trading fleet' of over sixty ships, part bound for India with an indispensable cargo of supplies and munitions, was captured by a Spanish squadron.

In 1782 and 1783 substantial bodies of French troops were safely convoyed to India. But, though cut off at times from their base, the British succeeded in holding their own. In 1782, a year before the end of the war in Europe and America, peace was made with the Marathas, and in 1784 with the Nizam and with Tipu, Haidar Ali's son and successor. That the Company survived its perilous ordeal was mainly due to Warren Hastings, Governor-General of Bengal from 1773 to 1785, who had to grapple almost single-handed not only with his French and Indian enemies but also with a jealous disloyalty on the part of the Madras and Bombay Governments and a rancorous hostility among his own colleagues in Bengal which showed that the traditional vices of Indian politics were not peculiar to Indians.

Once more the peace was only a truce. In 1793 the last round of the long fight between France and Britain opened with the War of the French Revolution, soon to become the Napoleonic War. And again India was at once involved. Since 1783 French agents had been busily engaged throughout the Middle East and at the Indian courts. 'Egypt offers us', said Talleyrand, soon after the outbreak of war, 'the means of ousting the English from India.' Napoleon agreed. 'To ruin England utterly', he said, 'we must seize Egypt. Through Egypt we come into touch with India.' In 1798 he was in Cairo with his 'Army of the East', and thence he wrote a series of dispatches to prepare the way for the next move eastwards—to the Governor of Île de France, informing him of his arrival on the fringes of the Indian Ocean; to the Sherif of Mecca, protesting his friendship; to the Imam of Muscat—a strategic key-point on the coastal route—promising his protection; and last, but not least, to Tipu of Mysore, who had recently concluded an alliance with the French Republic and permitted the French agents at his court to plant the 'tree of liberty' at his capital, Seringapatam. Napoleon's letter to him, intercepted by a British agent, spoke of the arrival at the Red Sea of 'an innumerable and invincible army, filled with the desire of delivering you from the iron yoke of England'.<sup>1</sup> Not long ago Indians were listening to similar bravado broadcast from Berlin and Tokyo.

Just at this time, as it happened, Wellesley, another dynamic personality, became Governor-General. He promptly set himself to counter Napoleon's designs by striking at the roots of the

<sup>1</sup> For these letters see *Correspondence inédite officielle confidentielle de Napoléon Bonaparte avec les cours étrangères* (Paris, 1819), vol. iv; and the author's *East Africa and its Invaders* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 88-9.

French connexion with the 'country powers'. In 1798 he forced the Nizam of Hyderabad to dismiss his French officers and accept and subsidise a British force for his protection. In 1799, Tipu having refused to break off his alliance with the French, he invaded Mysore. Seringapatam was stormed and Tipu died fighting. The central part of Mysore was thereupon restored to the old Hindu dynasty under British surveillance. The rest of it was annexed to the British Presidency of Madras. So was the Carnatic, whose Nawab was found to have been in secret communication with Tipu; and the ruler of Tanjore was persuaded to surrender his territories in return for a pension. Thus by 1800, except for central Mysore, Travancore and one or two small States, the whole of the southern apex of India had become part of the British Presidency of Madras.

There remained the Marathas, the most formidable of the Company's enemies. They were known to have established a liaison with the French, but the chance of a French army coming to their aid was destroyed by the Battle of the Nile in 1799. In 1800 a British fleet was dispatched from Bombay to close the exit from the Red Sea. In 1801 a British force, landed at Aboukir, and a British-Indian force, landed at Kosseir, compelled the French evacuation of Egypt. Action had been taken, meantime, to cut the threads of French intrigue in the Middle East: treaties of alliance were concluded with the Shah of Persia, with the Imam of Muscat, and with the Sultan of Lahej at Aden. But the war with Napoleon was by no means over; though a peace was patched up in 1802, it lasted only fourteen months; and Wellesley continued to regard India primarily as an extension of the European battlefield. In 1803 he intervened in the perennial disputes between the Maratha chiefs by giving military support to the Peshwa, the titular overlord of the confederacy, at the price of his recognition of British paramountcy. The inevitable result was a war with the stronger chiefs—a successful war in which Wellesley's brother, Arthur, began the career of victory that was to be crowned at Waterloo. Of the four major chiefs two now accepted British suzerainty, and one had already done so, but the fourth continued to assert his independence. In 1804 Wellesley declared war on him and was in process of reversing the defeats he had suffered at the outset when he was recalled. The Company's directors had been alarmed for some time by a policy of war and conquest which violated the principles laid down, as will be seen, by Parliament, and, now that the prospect of a French attack on India seemed to



have faded away, they decided to stop it. Wellesley's successor was instructed to come to terms with the Marathas.

In fact the French danger was by no means extinct. Napoleon had not forgotten India. As early as 1801, being now master of Holland, he sent Marshal Daendels to Batavia to reorganise the Dutch colonial forces. In 1802 General Decaen was appointed 'Captain-General of the East' and, fixing his headquarters in Île de France, began to revive La Bourdonnais's plans for attacking India. In 1803 contact was re-established with Muscat. In 1805 and 1806 French missions were dispatched to Teheran, and in 1807 a Persian envoy met Napoleon in Poland and concluded a treaty binding the Shah to break off relations with Britain and expel all British ships and subjects from his ports and territories. A few months later General Gardane arrived at Teheran with 24 French officers and 300 men, the vanguard, as they told the Persians, of the coming army. Meanwhile the Peace of Tilsit had enabled Napoleon to bring Russia into his scheme.

All Europe having combined against England [he wrote] we can think about an expedition to India. The more chimerical it appears, the more it will alarm England when it is actually undertaken, and what could not France and Russia accomplish! Forty thousand Frenchmen, to whom the Porte would allow passage through Constantinople, in co-operation with forty thousand Russians advancing over the Caucasus would be sufficient to spread terror through Asia and to conquer it.

Nor had Napoleon overlooked the naval side of the enterprise. He instructed Gardane to keep in touch with Decaen and ordered preparations to be made for the dispatch of 16,000 men, escorted by twelve warships, to Île de France and 12,000 men to Egypt. Secret agents finally were set to work once more in India.<sup>1</sup>

The danger did not materialise; for in 1808 the revolt in Spain and the landing of Arthur Wellesley's army in Portugal set in motion the sequence of events which was to keep Napoleon occupied in Europe and ultimately to bring about his downfall. But in the meanwhile Minto, Governor-General from 1807 to 1813, who had taken the possibility of a march on India seriously, since, as he wrote, it would be directed by 'a man whose energy and success appear almost commensurate with his ambition', had launched a counter-offensive and broken the strategic circle which Napoleon had drawn round India by land and sea. Treaties of defensive

<sup>1</sup> Further details and authorities are given in *East Africa and its Invaders* (Oxford 1938), chaps. iv-v.

alliance were concluded with the border states of Sind, the Punjab and Afghanistan; permission was obtained from the Imam of Muscat for British-Indian troops to occupy one of his ports if it should be necessary thereby to forestall a French advance along the coast; and an attempt was made, unsuccessfully in 1808, successfully in 1810, to win the Shah of Persia over to the British side. At sea, while an invasion of India was no longer to be feared from Île de France, it continued to shelter those famous French privateers whose raids on British shipping were inflicting losses running at this time into several million pounds. In 1810, together with its satellite, Bourbon, it was attacked and captured. Finally, in 1811, came the occupation of Java.

At the peace settlement of 1814-15 Britain alone of the victorious coalition surrendered some of her conquests. Java and its neighbour-islands were restored to the Dutch—much to Napoleon's astonishment, it was reported at St. Helena—and Bourbon and their ports in India and Madagascar to the French. But Britain retained the Cape, Ceylon, Mauritius and the Seychelles, and presently acquired Aden. India might still be exposed to the possibility of attack overland, but not for a long time to come by sea. From 1815 to 1941 the British command of the Indian Ocean was undisputed.

This brief summary of a long and complex chapter of events suffices to show that the beginning of British rule in India was not prompted by what has come to be called 'imperialism'. It did not originate in British aggression. It was the outcome of anarchy in India aggravated by war in Europe—a war which Britain fought to save herself and thereby the rest of Europe from the domination of Napoleon. Extended to India, that war was still at root defensive. The British were resisting or forestalling attack. If Wellesley had more of a taste for conquest than Clive or Warren Hastings, if he thought that the extension of British rule in India was not only good for the Indians but augmented British power and prestige, nevertheless the mainspring of his militarism was in Europe. In Mysore and the Maharashtra he felt he was fighting Napoleon.

In the course of that fighting the British suffered one or two serious reverses, but usually they won their battles. This was not due to a lack of spirit in the Indian peoples. Indian soldiers could fight then with the same high courage with which they have faced the far worse terrors of modern war. British superiority lay mainly in military science and technology—in better strategy,

discipline and fire-drill, and in better artillery, equipment and transport. It must be remembered, moreover, that it was mainly Indian troops that won those British victories. The proportion of British soldiers to Indian sepoys was about one to five or six; and the British usually had Indian allies also fighting at their side. As Seeley pointed out sixty years ago,<sup>1</sup> it is misleading to speak of a British conquest of India in so far as it suggests that the British Raj was established by Britons unaided. It could not have been established if India had been one nation or a group of nations united in resistance to a foreign foe.

It should also be remembered that the Indians who fought as British troops or allies were not only helping to create a British Raj, but were also helping to prevent the creation of a French Raj. Dupleix's or Napoleon's designs on India were not confined to the ejection of their European rivals. The British were certainly a 'bait',<sup>2</sup> but so was India. 'This little Europe is too small a field', said Napoleon, dreaming of replaying the role of Alexander in the East; and it is as certain as any historical 'might-have-been' can be that, if Napoleon had defeated Britain, he would have sat on the throne of the Great Moguls. Thus it was not a question of India's independence. Until India could become so united and so equipped as to be able to defend herself, the question was only on which of the stronger foreign powers she would be dependent.

### III

## The Expansion of British Rule

### I. THE MAKING OF BRITISH INDIA

THE statesmen and business-men who began to build a second British Empire on the ruins of the first were not bent on territorial aggrandisement. They did not foresee, still less design, either the Commonwealth of Nations or the Colonial Empire in the Tropics. The American Revolution had convinced them that an imperialism based on 'colonies' and 'possessions' was mistaken. They believed that Colonies in temperate zones, peopled by British emigrants, would sooner or later break away from Britain and that territorial annexation in tropical zones was profitless and unnecessary. Their new empire was to be an empire of the sea and an empire of trade. For the first only a minimum of territory was needed, that of those strategic bases—Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, Cape-town, Mauritius and the like—on which sea-power rested. For the second the only needs were footholds and facilities for traders. Roe's rule, in fact, was to be applied to the world at large. It had proved, it was true, impossible to keep it in India, but there need be, it was held, and there must be, no further breaches of it. The rule may be said, indeed, to have been written into the British statute book; for the Act of 1784 (under which, as will be seen, the Company's Indian policy was effectively subjected to the British Government's control) contained an unusual clause forbidding the Governor-General and Council to make war, or to conclude a treaty likely to lead to war, on the ground that 'to pursue schemes of conquest and extension of dominion in India are measures repugnant to the wish, the honour, and policy of this nation'. It was Wellesley's apparent repudiation of this doctrine that led to his recall in 1805.

But by 1815 this anti-territorial philosophy of empire was already being undermined. To British officials and soldiers in India, in the first place, conquest and dominion were naturally less repugnant than to ministers and merchants in London. Much of the fighting was stiff and costly, and it was only human to take a pride in victory. It was only human, too, to enjoy the exercise of power, and even the unimaginative Englishman was bound to feel how strange was the turn of fate which had made him and his companions from their little far-off island the masters of so

vast and old a country and its innumerable people. Thus the ideas were born which were to make the British Raj the chief inspiration of the romantic imperialism of a later day. But there was more in the minds of Wellesley and his like than glory and romance. They saw the India of their day at close quarters—the depths of misconduct and disorder to which its government had sunk, the incapacity or depravity of the rulers, the misery of the ruled. The social and political standards of their England might be far from ideal, but the contrast was glaring enough; and it was not so much racial arrogance, it was more a sense of common decency, that made them want to govern India and put things straight. That was what Wellesley was feeling when he said, ‘I can declare my honest conviction that no greater blessing can be conferred on the native inhabitants of India than the extension of British authority’.<sup>1</sup> And, like the first awakening of imperial pride, this new sense of mission, less materialist but not less human, had its reactions on public opinion in England. It chimed with the humanitarian movement now in triumphant progress from the abolition of the British slave trade in 1807 to the abolition of slavery in the British Colonies in 1833. Burke had regarded the power which Britain had acquired in India as a ‘trust’ to be exercised for the welfare of the Indian people.<sup>2</sup> To Wilberforce it was an opportunity for admitting into a heathen land ‘the genial influence of Christian light and truth’.<sup>3</sup> Both of them believed that what had happened in India had been willed by the ‘Sovereign Disposer’.<sup>4</sup> But perhaps the most remarkable champion of a forward policy in India was James Mill, the philosophical radical and agnostic, so different in training and outlook from a Wellesley or a Wilberforce. A pioneer historian of India and a clerk at the Company’s headquarters in London, he knew and cared more about the Indian question than most of his stay-at-home fellow-countrymen, and he frankly applauded the growth of British power because it meant the salvation of the Indian people from Indian despotism. ‘The feelings of millions’, he wrote, ‘are of more value than the feelings of an individual . . . and on the same principle

<sup>1</sup> P. E. Roberts, *India under Wellesley* (London, 1929), p. 136.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 43 below.

<sup>3</sup> R. Coupland, *Wilberforce* (2nd ed., London, 1945), p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> Compare David Livingstone’s efforts to overcome the British Government’s antipathy to territorial expansion in Central Africa. Only British rule, he pleaded, could put a stop to strife and havoc and promote the spread of civilisation and Christianity. See R. Coupland, *Kirk on the Zambesi* (Oxford, 1928), p. 270.

we should rejoice that every inch of ground within the limits of India were subject to their [the Company's] sway.'<sup>1</sup>

But the expansion of the British Raj was not determined by the arguments of militarists or moralists. It was dictated by the circumstances. Unless the British were prepared to evacuate India and leave it to be occupied by another Great Power, the scope of their authority was bound to expand through 'causes', as an able and upright British official put it, 'which we have not the power to control'.<sup>2</sup> Two systems of government so different in their standards and methods as were the British and the Indian in those days could not continue in existence side by side for any length of time. Other powerful and progressive nations whose borders have marched with those of backward and ill-governed states have been confronted with a similar situation and with similar results. Sooner or later the one system has been compelled to take control, directly or indirectly, of the other. And it has seldom been possible to avoid the use of force. The weaker party, whether in over-confidence or in desperation, has usually challenged the stronger. Thus, though in the wars in India after Wellesley's day it was, with one exception, the Indians who attacked the British, their aggression was in a sense defensive. They were trying to save what remained of their freedom before it was too late.

Within ten years of Wellesley's recall the impossibility of maintaining the frontiers of British rule where he had left them was plain. His two immediate successors, Cornwallis and Barlow, by obeying their pacific instructions, only made the renewal of war more certain. The Marathas had been beaten but not broken, and their chiefs were bound to interpret the new policy as a confession of weakness. The British withdrawal, moreover, from intervention in Central India had opened the sluices to yet another flood of anarchy and rapine. A host of reckless adventurers, known as the Pindaris, who had joined the Marathas in war as a sort of irregular force maintained by a share of the loot, had continued to follow their trade in peace. Banded together in armies, equipped sometimes with artillery, they massacred and pillaged far and wide. Encouraged by British quiescence, they even crossed the Company's borders. In 1812 they raided Bihar. Nothing happened. In 1816 they raided the Northern Circars. This time Governor-General Moira (later Hastings) was ordered to suppress

<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Mill's *History of India* by Roberts, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Sir John Malcolm, *ibid.*, p. 206.

them, and in 1817 he organised an encircling movement on a great scale. Not unnaturally, those Maratha chiefs who had not, like the Gaekwar of Baroda, thrown in their lot with the British, chose this moment to renew the old fight. So one war became two, and in both the result was decisive. The Pindaris were annihilated. The Maratha confederacy was dissolved, and the chiefs, while allowed to retain their domestic authority within strictly limited territories, were subjected to British suzerainty. The rest of Maharashtra was annexed to the Presidency of Bombay.

In 1818 only three Indian territories remained free from British control<sup>1</sup>—Assam, Sind and the Punjab. Thirty years later there were none. This last chapter in the record of British expansion is marked by the re-entry of external factors into Indian politics.

The hill-country of Assam had succeeded in resisting subjection to the Mogul Empire, but in 1816 it was conquered by the Burmans. Their rule was brutal, and the Assamese vainly appealed for aid to the neighbouring British authorities. In 1818 the King of Burma, wholly ignorant of the power of other countries than his own, demanded the cession of the frontier districts of Bengal. In 1823 he dispatched an army to storm Calcutta. The upshot of the subsequent war was the cession of Assam to the British. The hill tribes on the eastern frontier, who are neither Indians nor Burmans but of Sinitic stock, were organised as dependent States under their ancestral chiefs. Most of the rest of the country was annexed to the Presidency of Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

There remained the north-western borderlands beyond the Indus and the Sutlej—Sind and the Punjab. Both had freed themselves from Afghan rule. In the Punjab there was little to cause anxiety in British minds as long as Ranjit Singh was its ruler. He not only controlled the chronic rivalries and ambitions of his followers—the martial Sikh minority who had dominated the Moslems and Hindus in what, then as now, was a multi-communal state—he was also determined not to quarrel with the British and faithfully observed the treaty of friendship he had concluded with the

<sup>1</sup> As the result of a hard-fought war in 1814–15 the Gurkha kingdom of Nepal on the slopes of the Himalayas was ultimately recognised as an independent State in alliance with Britain. It has now ceased to be regarded as part of India.

<sup>2</sup> A seaboard district of Burma was also ceded. All Lower Burma was annexed after the war of 1852 and Upper Burma after the war of 1885. For purposes of administrative convenience Burma was incorporated in the Indian Empire. Its separate nationhood was recognised by its severance from India in 1937.

Company at the time of Napoleon's threat to India. Sind, overwhelmingly Moslem in population, was divided into three States, each ruled by a despotic Amir. Militarily far weaker than the Punjab, it could not be regarded as a potential danger to British India, and till 1838 the only point of friction with the Company lay in the Amirs' control of the trade-route down the Indus. The country was ill-governed. Sooner or later, no doubt, it would have shared the fate of other Indian States. But it might have retained at least a measure of domestic independence if its position had not been sharply affected by the reaction of events beyond its western frontier.

From about 1830 onwards there was a period of serious tension between Britain and Russia. It was believed in London that the Tsar's Government was not only cherishing those designs on Constantinople which led later on to the Crimean War, but that its policy of expansion in Central Asia was a new edition of Napoleon's plan for an overland attack on India. Whatever the real danger may have been in this 'Russian bogey', as it has sometimes been called, the attempt of Governor-General Auckland to forestall it was hasty and ill-conceived. To secure the buffer-state of Afghanistan against Russian infiltration and domination, he deposed its ruler, Dost Muhammad, installed a pro-British protégé on the throne, and stationed a British force at Kabul to protect him. The Afghans rose in rebellion (1841-2). The British officials were killed. The British and Indian troops were surrounded and annihilated. Only one man out of 16,000 soldiers and camp-followers escaped to tell the tale in India. The military situation was soon retrieved, but it was wisely decided to acquiesce in Dost Muhammad's recovery of his throne and to evacuate the country.

Sind lay across the more southerly routes that led through the mountains to Afghanistan, and in 1838, as a prelude to his disastrous Afghan adventure, Auckland insisted on the Amirs' permitting British troops to cross their territory. They reluctantly agreed; but, fearful of their own ultimate fate, they conspired against the intruders and violated, as far as they dared, the undertakings imposed on them. Inevitably their hostility was stiffened by the catastrophe in 1840. Yet the war—the only war in the annals of the British Raj which cannot be regarded as in some sense or in some degree defensive—might not have occurred if Auckland's successor, Ellenborough, had not thought it necessary to do something to counter the effect of the Afghan débâcle on British prestige. British public opinion, though it afterwards



acquiesced in the *fait accompli*, would certainly have opposed such a policy if it had known it was afoot. As it was, it was outspokenly assailed on the spot by the chivalrous Outram, British political agent in Sind. 'It grieves me to say', he wrote to Charles Napier, the general to whom Ellenborough had given a free hand, 'that my heart and the judgement God has given me unite in condemning the measures we are carrying out as most tyrannical—positive robbery.'<sup>1</sup> Napier himself, while genuinely sympathising with the sufferings of the people under the Amirs' rule, made no pretences. 'We have no right to seize Sind,' he wrote in his diary before the fighting began in 1843; 'yet we shall do so, and a very advantageous, useful, humane piece of rascality it will be.'<sup>2</sup> Forced into war, the Amirs were quickly defeated and Sind was annexed to the Presidency of Bombay. A few months later Ellenborough, much to his astonishment, was recalled.

Now the Punjab stood alone. Nobody thought of trying to treat it as Sind had been treated. The Sikhs were a more formidable proposition, and it was hoped in British circles that the Punjab would continue to play the useful part of a friendly guardian of the north-west frontier. But the death of Ranjit Singh in 1839 had at once let loose the factious spirit of the Sikh community—the succession was disputed till 1844—and had set its more bellicose leaders free to inflame their followers with the idea of making a bid for the mastery of northern India. It only needed the Afghan disaster to convince them that they could beat the British. In 1845 they crossed the Sutlej into British territory. Four battles ensued, the fiercest the British had yet had to fight in India and only won by them at heavy cost.

The terms of the peace treaty (1846) proved that the British authorities had not been aiming at the annexation of the Punjab. Its independence was reaffirmed. A Sikh army, 32,000 strong, was permitted to remain in being. If a British resident was sent to Lahore, backed for a limited period by a small British garrison, it was mainly in the hope of strengthening the hands of the Sikh Government and of those sectional leaders who stood for peace. The experiment broke down. The Sikh hotheads wanted another fight. In vain Governor-General Hardinge reasserted the British desire for an 'independent and prosperous' Punjab whose success or failure lay with its own people. In 1848 a local outbreak, in which two British officers were murdered, quickly swelled into a

<sup>1</sup> T. Rice Holmes, *Sir Charles Napier* (Cambridge, 1929), p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43.

general rebellion of the Sikhs against their Government and its British friends. The second Sikh War followed, a war of two big battles. At Chilianwala the casualties on the British side were nearly 2,500 out of some 14,000—a high figure for the fighting of those days. Gujrat was a cheaper victory, and decisive. This time there could be no question of independence. The only doubt was as to whether the Punjab should still be nominally ruled by a Sikh maharaja with British officials and under British control or should come fully and directly under British rule. Hardinge's successor, Dalhousie, decided on the second course. In 1849 the Punjab was annexed to British India.

It remains to describe the substantial accretion of British territory in India which was effected otherwise than by war and conquest. It occurred towards the end of the period under review, and was the work of Dalhousie, than whom no Governor-General, not Wellesley himself, was more convinced that British rule was better for the ruled than Indian. He put on record his 'strong and deliberate opinion that the British Government is bound not to put aside or neglect such rightful opportunities of acquiring territory as may from time to time present themselves'.<sup>1</sup> The death of the rulers of a number of Indian States without natural heirs seemed to him just such a rightful opportunity; for these were States which had not been independent before the establishment of the British Raj but subject to other States which had now been brought under British control; and Dalhousie could therefore claim that his Government had inherited the traditional right to annex such States when their rulers left no natural heirs unless they had adopted heirs with that Government's assent. Various units, big and small, were taken over in accordance with this 'doctrine of lapse'. But there was one great territory to which it could not be applied. Though Oudh depended on British protection, it had not forfeited its domestic autonomy; and that unhappily had meant the continuance and indeed the aggravation of gross misgovernment.

A terrible picture of it has been preserved in the day-to-day record kept by Colonel Sleeman, Resident at Lucknow, when he travelled through the country in 1849-50.<sup>2</sup> He found—what indeed had long been common knowledge—that the whole fabric of law and order had broken down. The only instruments for keeping the peace were the ill-disciplined troops who often joined in the

<sup>1</sup> Muir, *Making of British India* (1917), p. 351. <sup>2</sup> Document I, p. 289 below.

pillage of the countryside in order to make up for arrears of pay. Thus the people were at the mercy of the great landlords (*talukdars*), mostly of Rajput origin, who, safe in their forts, defied, like the lawless barons of medieval Europe, the authority of the King, and preyed as ruthlessly as the Pindaris on the weaker landowners and helpless villagers.

The truth of Sleeman's grim narrative was confirmed by Outram's unimpeachable authority: yet nothing had been done. In vain successive Governors-General had complained of the bad effects in British India of this perpetual scandal on its borders; in vain they had warned the King of Oudh to put his house in order. To Dalhousie it seemed intolerable to go on standing by and doing nothing. He recommended drastic action as the only means by which the undeniable misery of the common people of Oudh could be relieved. The authorities in London had usually been more hesitant than the man on the spot, but on this occasion they outpaced him. Dalhousie had proposed to take the kingdom under British administration without depriving the King of his throne and title. He was instructed to annex it outright.

## 2. THE MAKING OF THE INDIAN STATES

By the annexation of Oudh in 1856 the expansion of British India came to an end. Except for some forward moves on the north-west frontier, the boundaries then established are virtually the boundaries of to-day. But the vast area thus brought under direct British rule, stretching from the Indus to the Brahmaputra and from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, was not a single unbroken block of territory. Interspersed throughout it were a multitude of 'States', of all shapes and sizes, in which the British Raj imposed its authority not directly as in British India but indirectly, not on their peoples but on their rulers. Together the States cover about two-fifths of India.

This division of India between two systems of government might almost be described as accidental. At any rate it was not premeditated or planned. Nor was there any natural or logical reason why the advancing tide of British rule should have left such a multitude of autonomous islands high and dry. The arguments of the expansionists applied to them as much as to any other part of India, and they were equally incapable in the long run of resisting the power of the British Raj. Why then did they survive? Mainly because the agents of the Raj had promised that they

should. Those promises were inspired solely by the practical exigencies of the period of expansion. In order to strengthen the British position in the welter of strife and intrigue, it seemed expedient to purchase the alliance and assistance of this great ruler or of that small chief by undertaking to respect and protect his dynastic rights within his own domains.

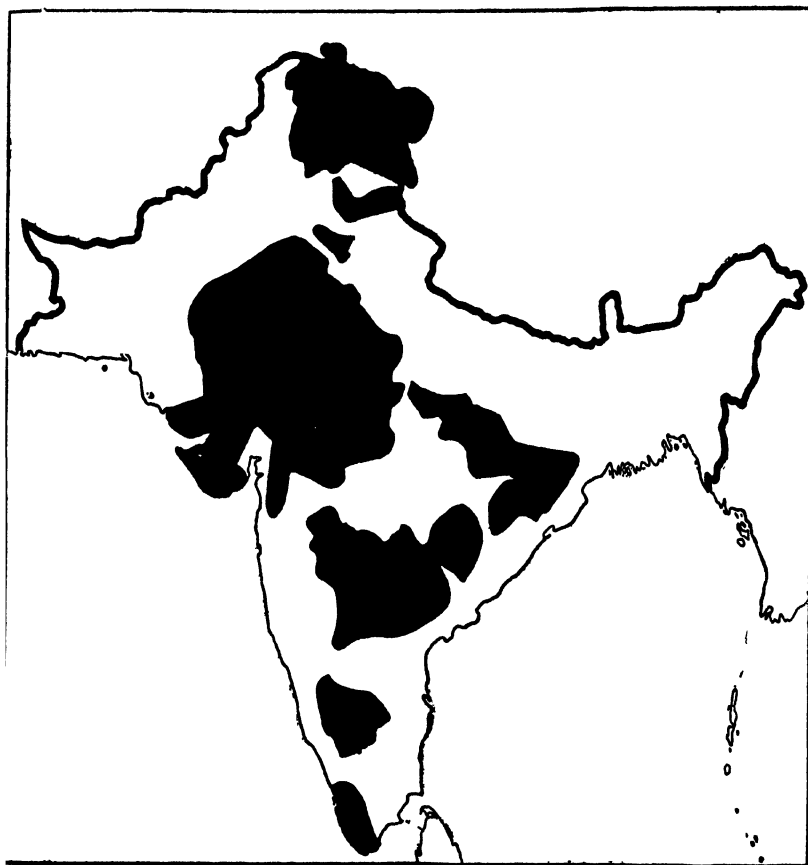
The extent of autonomy thus guaranteed varied with the size and standing of the State. The compacts made with a smaller unit, in which self-government in any full sense was impossible, did little more than recognise the rights of a landlord, invested perhaps with a limited legislative and judicial authority, while they imposed a substantial measure of British control over the administration of his territory. With the more important States the agreements—officially described as treaties, *sanads*, or engagements—were of a more balanced or bilateral character. The British Government for its part undertook certain obligations, which have come to be interpreted in the light of decisions made and action taken during the century and more that has elapsed since the agreements were first made. To put it in technical terms, the relations between the British Government and the States are determined not only by the letter of the treaties but also by 'usage and sufferance'. But the essential validity of the undertakings is not subject to legal disputation. The hard core of them cannot be whittled away. And that core may be broadly defined as a promise to maintain the territorial integrity of the States and the sovereignty of their dynastic rulers in all their internal affairs. Two examples out of many may be cited. The third article of the treaty with Bharatpur in 1803 guarantees that 'the British Government shall never interfere in the concerns of the Maharajah's country'.<sup>1</sup> The second article of the treaty with Bikaner in 1818 declares that 'the British Government engages to protect the principality and territory of Bikaner', and the ninth article that 'the Maharajah of Bikaner and his heirs and successors shall be absolute rulers of their country and the British jurisdiction shall not be introduced into that principality'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the main difference between the results of the treaty-system and the results of annexation is clear. In British India the previous rulers were deposed, their territory became British soil, their people British subjects. In 'Indian India', on the other

<sup>1</sup> C. U. Aitcheson, *Collection of Treaties, Engagements, and Sanads relating to India and neighbouring Countries* (4th ed., Calcutta, 1909), iii. p. 274.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

hand, the rulers remained on their thrones, their subjects were still theirs,<sup>1</sup> they could treat them much as they pleased. Only in the event of gross misgovernment was a British right of interference explicitly or tacitly reserved.



*British India (white) and the Indian States (black)*

In return for the guarantee of domestic independence the rulers of the States for their part accepted the suzerainty of the British Crown, agreed to surrender all control of their relations with other Indian States—and *a fortiori* with the outer world—to the 'Paramount Power', and undertook to provide military forces if required for the defence of India and to co-operate in the extension of

<sup>1</sup> For passport and other purposes abroad, subjects of Indian States are treated as 'British protected persons'.

communications and other matters affecting India as a whole. Those were substantial concessions and obligations, but so was the boon they bought. British promises, backed by British power, gave the rulers of the States a security for their territories and themselves such as their predecessors had never enjoyed for any length of time.

All told, the States number no less than 562, but most of them are small, some only a few square miles in area and more like estates than States. About 100 of them are regarded as of superior rank. Of these Hyderabad in the Deccan is the largest with a population of 15 millions. In the north the most important is Kashmir (4 millions); in the south Mysore (7) and Travancore (7); in the west Baroda ( $2\frac{3}{4}$ ), Gwalior (4), Indore ( $1\frac{1}{2}$ ), and the States of Rajputana ( $11\frac{1}{2}$ ).

Though the geographical layout is a patchwork, it has a certain broad coherence. Taken together the States constitute a great cruciform barrier, broken by gaps of varying width, but more or less effectively separating the different parts of British India from one another. The strategic and economic implications of this fact are plain.

### 3. THE MUTINY

When Dalhousie left India in 1856 the British Raj had been established, as has been seen, directly or indirectly, over the whole of India. In 1857 it was suddenly challenged by the rebellion known to history as the 'Indian Mutiny'.

Up to a point 'mutiny' is the proper word. It was the sepoys of the Bengal Army, recruited mainly from Moslems and high-caste Hindus from more martial areas than Bengal, who began the revolt and did most to sustain it. And the reason why they mutinied is clear. Despite all the official caution to be described in a later chapter, they had come to believe that the ultimate intention of their British rulers was to subvert their faith. This suspicion was strengthened when, with a view to the need of garrisons in Burma, Dalhousie proposed and his successor, Canning, decreed that enlistments should be made for service outside as well as inside India—a deliberate attempt, it seemed, to break down the rule of caste which forbade the crossing of salt water. Suspicion became certainty when new rifles were served out which necessitated the biting-off of greased cartridge ends—an unpardonable blunder, since the grease was animal fat, and the cow was sacred to Hindus and the pig the essence of pollution to Mos-

lems. Their discipline weakened by the transfer of many of their best officers to civil posts in the Punjab and in Oudh, proud of their warlike traditions, and measuring British power by the small British force in India, the Bengal regiments were spurred by this last wanton insult, as they conceived it, to rise and overthrow the British Raj.<sup>1</sup> The sequel is a familiar story that need not be repeated here. One point, however, may be noted—the shortness of the struggle. It began in May 1857. The issue was decided before the end of that year. In June 1858 it was all over.

It was a mutiny but more than a mutiny. It was backed by malcontents in Oudh where the big landowners had not forgiven the annexation and the loss it had inflicted on their power and property. Here and there Deccani Brahmans rose in the hope of recovering the position they had held under Maratha rule. Though there was little overt disturbance elsewhere, there was dangerous tension at most points where sepoy garrisons were stationed; and, if the mutineers had shown signs of gaining the upper hand in the north, the scope of the rebellion would probably have been far wider. For behind the particular grievances of the Bengal Army lay a more general and palpable discontent, not indeed among the mass of the people, who had no quarrel with the men who had brought a new peace and lawfulness to their village life, but among those who had been the governing class before the British came to usurp the prestige and emoluments and all the other advantages of place and power. And behind that again was the natural reaction of one civilisation under pressure from another, of an old order threatened by a new, of Asia invaded by Europe. Undoubtedly the energy and efficiency of Dalhousie's administration had stiffened that reaction. Did not his annexations mean that very soon not an acre of Indian soil would be governed any longer in the old Indian way? Nor could old-fashioned Indians, Hindu or Moslem, observe without alarm the grip that modern science was riveting so quickly on their ancient land. Those long lines of steel, those engines belching steam and flame, those magical electric wires—was there not something diabolical about it all? Ignorantly and dimly, but with a quite true instinct, they realised that under the impact of the West with all its material power the East could not remain unchanged.

But if the outbreak was more than a mutiny, it was not a national rebellion against foreign rule. Some sepoy regiments fought bravely beside the British. The Sikhs made no attempt to

<sup>1</sup> There were 233,000 sepoys in India in 1856 and 45,300 British troops.

recover their independence: on the contrary Sikh and other Punjabi volunteers marched to join the British force at Delhi—a remarkable testimony to the work of the brilliant little group of British officials who had been entrusted with the administration of the conquered Punjab after 1849. Southern India, on the whole, stayed quiet. None of the rulers of the leading States, who held the strategic keys of Central India, joined in the revolt. Canning, indeed, went so far as to describe them as ‘breakwaters to the storm which would otherwise have swept over us in one great wave’.<sup>1</sup> Nor was there any anti-British feeling on India’s borders. Dost Muhammad at Kabul was scrupulously faithful to his treaty of friendship with the British-Indian Government. Nepal sent a force to its aid in Oudh.

On the great mass of the population, the countryfolk, the Mutiny had little effect outside the areas of disturbance. Within those areas they cowered in their villages praying for the trouble to end; for, wherever orderly government broke down, the lawless elements—the bad characters, the broken men, the professional criminals—seized their chance and turned on their helpless neighbours, killing and looting. Old private feuds, too, broke out afresh, and debtors turned on moneylenders and burnt their books. That aspect of the Mutiny was proof, if it were wanted, of the need for a strong administration in a country where so much that was primitive and barbarous still lurked beneath the crust of civilisation.

Limited though it was in range and short in duration, the Mutiny was none the less a terrible tragedy. Maybe a trial of strength some time between the old régime and the new could only have been avoided by a wisdom and capacity beyond the scope of ordinary men. Maybe, too, it served the peace and welfare of an India as yet incapable of governing itself that the power of its alien governors should be so irresistibly displayed. But, while the record of both races in those black months has its heroic pages, it is also stained by acts of passion and brutality. The atrocities committed by the mutineers, especially the slaughter of the British prisoners and the murder of the British women and children at Cawnpore, horrified the civilised world in that placid mid-Victorian age at least as much as the immeasurably greater crimes of the Nazis in our own day; and they were avenged on the spot and in hot blood by some, though by no means all, of the British soldiers in command with small regard for justice or humanity till Canning reimposed the rule of law. Outside the area of the fighting the wrath and

<sup>1</sup> Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 468.



rancour provoked by the rebellion were scarcely less intense. Those British business-men who had shown least courage at the crisis were loudest in denouncing 'Clemency Canning' and demanding indiscriminate revenge.<sup>1</sup> And even in faraway England so fierce for a time was the language of private talk and of the press as to suggest that Englishmen's natural indignation at the barbarous treatment of their kinsfolk was enhanced by a sense of wounded racial pride.<sup>2</sup> But this was a passing mood, and the second thoughts and better feelings of the British people were reflected in Queen Victoria's historic proclamation of 1858 which promised 'unconditional pardon, amnesty, and oblivion of all offence' to all rebels except those convicted of committing murder or taking a lead in the revolt.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> G. O. Trevelyan, Macaulay's nephew and the historian of the American Revolution, was in India as a young man in 1863-4, and described in *The Competition Wallah* (1st ed., London, 1864) the attitude of the business community and—in sharp contrast—the coolness and moderation of the officials and their unbroken allegiance to the doctrine of 'trusteeship'.

<sup>2</sup> See Macaulay's confession and the stern judgement of Oliver Wendell Holmes (Delhi, *Dele*): Macaulay's *Life and Letters*, pp. 655-7

<sup>3</sup> Muir, *op. cit.*, pp. 383-4. Only murderers were to suffer the death penalty.

## Part Two

# THE BRITISH RAJ

### I

## The Political Aspect

#### I. THE INTERVENTION OF PARLIAMENT

**A**N attempt must now be made to sketch in the baldest outline the primary features of British rule in India.

That the Raj made a discreditable start is not in question. The black facts of the decade or so after Plassey are well known—the misrule and misery of Bengal and the great fortunes amassed by the Company's servants, partly, as Clive protested, by openly accepting 'presents' in accordance with immemorial Indian custom, partly in even more disreputable ways. Less familiar is the unsavoury scandal of the Nabob of Arcot's debts—the organised exploitation of a ruler's extravagance by a group of British sharks. The cause of all this is also not in doubt. It was the inevitable result, human nature being what it is, of power without responsibility. The Company's servants were the masters of Bengal and other territories, but they were not responsible for their government. Though it was they and their Indian agents rather than the puppets on the throne who were in fact obeyed, they still regarded themselves as traders only; and, since they had always been tacitly allowed to implement their nominal salaries by trading on their own account, some of them used their power to enrich themselves without any sense of the duty towards the Indian people which the possession of that power implied.

If this period of exploitation in its sinister sense was inevitable, so was its end, as soon as British public opinion became aware of what was happening in India. The disclosure was brought about mainly in two ways. First the disorganisation of Bengal, however profitable for the Company's individual servants on the spot, meant a steep fall in the dividends of its shareholders at home. Secondly, there could be no mistaking the significance of the 'Nabobs', as they were called, the men who had been coming home, still in the prime of life, yet very wealthy, and proceeding to buy their way into society and even into Parliament. The reaction was threefold. There was a business reaction. It was

borne in upon the 'City' that bad government was fatal to good trade, and good trade was more than ever desirable in India now that the loss of the American Colonies seemed to have thrown the economic balance of the Empire over from West to East. There was a political reaction. The Company, it appeared, was creating in India an *imperium in imperio*: it was clearly time for the British Government to assert its authority over British subjects anywhere under the British flag. There was also a moral reaction. The public conscience was startled by the story of tyranny and corruption, some of it highly coloured, which had come to light. The impeachment of Warren Hastings, it is now admitted, was a clumsy and unfair method of dealing with his particular case; but it is worth remembering that he would probably not have been tried at all if Pitt had not insisted that British conduct in India must be governed by British ideas of liberty and justice and not by Eastern custom; and, while Burke's indictment was pitifully overstrained, there was no doubting the sincerity of his moral indignation.

The outcome of this threefold reaction to events in India was a consensus of public opinion that the power which the force of circumstances had put into British hands must no longer be divorced from responsibility; that the primary British task in India was now not to trade, important though that still was, but to rule; and that that rule, which, as Burke said, was in the nature of a 'trust' for the benefit of the Indian people, must be controlled by the British Government and Parliament.

These principles were applied in two stages. The Act of 1773 planted the responsibility for the government of British India directly on the Company. The civil and military administration of Bengal was vested in a Governor-General and four Councillors, that of Bombay and Madras in corresponding Governors-in-Council. These bodies exercised both executive and legislative functions: they controlled the executive government and legislated by regulations. Bombay and Madras were made subordinate to Bengal in matters of war and peace, but were otherwise virtually independent. The Act of 1784 went further. The Company's administrative system was retained as a matter of convenience, but it was firmly subjected to the British Government's 'superintendence and control'. The directors still appointed and instructed the officials, but the instructions could now be varied and the officials recalled by a Board of Control whose ministerial president soon came to exercise something like the powers and responsibilities of the later Secretary of State for India.

Under this so-called 'dual system' the Company continued to carry on its business. It was not till 1813 that it was deprived of its monopoly of Eastern trade except with China and in tea, and not till 1833 that its commercial side was finally wound up. But after 1784 it ceased to be only or even primarily a business concern: it had become primarily an instrument of government, which, like any other instrument of British government at home or overseas, was under the ultimate control of the British Parliament and people. The twofold purpose to which that control was to be directed was defined by Pitt when he introduced the bill. It was intended, he told the House of Commons, on the one hand 'to confirm and enlarge the advantages derived by this country from its connexion with India' and on the other hand 'to render that connexion a blessing to the native Indians'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. BUREAUCRACY

The government of British India by Councils of officials at the Centre and in the Provinces,<sup>2</sup> confirmed by the Act of 1784, was to be modified in course of time by the intrusion of unofficial and popular elements; but this process, which will be described in the next part of this book, did not begin till 1861 and did not lead to any real transfer of legislative power till 1909 or of executive power till 1919. Till the twentieth century the British Raj was a pure and highly centralised bureaucracy, with an unbroken chain of official responsibility running from the Provinces to the Centre and from the Centre on to the British Government and Parliament. But the word 'bureaucracy' may be misleading if it suggests that the officials were all working at their desks in government offices: they were mostly out in the country and out of doors. Nor, of course, did the 'bureaucrats' enjoy a privileged legal status. There was no *droit administratif*. Like officials in England they were subject to the ordinary law.

The main crank of this great machine of government was the administrative corps which came to be called the Indian Civil Service. In character and purpose its members were very different

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches* (1806 ed.), i. 118.

<sup>2</sup> The terms 'Centre' and 'Central' were not applied till recent times to the Government of British India as a whole in contradistinction to the 'local' or Provincial Governments; but for the sake of clarity the terms will be used henceforward in this book. Similarly, though Bengal, Madras and Bombay retained the title of Presidencies till 1919, they will be called Provinces as they have been since then.

from the Company's agents in the bad days after Plassey. The new régime of State control had brought with it a new sense of public duty. Practical steps were taken to make a recurrence of the old scandals impossible. Officials' pay was raised and they were forbidden under penalty to engage in private trade or accept 'presents'. Cadets for the service were told to regard themselves no longer as 'agents of a commercial concern' but as 'ministers and officers of a powerful sovereign', charged with 'sacred trusts' for the good government of British India and the prosperity and happiness of its people.<sup>1</sup> No sober critic denies that on the whole the members of the I.C.S. have been true to those trusts. It is safe, indeed, to say that no bureaucracy has ever maintained a higher standard of ability and integrity. It drew into its ranks 'the flower of the youth of England'.<sup>2</sup> That it was able to do so was partly due to the material prospects of the career it offered. Fifty years ago, the initial salary was about £320 a year, and in most cases it rose, in the course of twenty-five years' service, to about £2350. Those few who secured the 'plums'—Provincial Governorships or Memberships of the Central and Provincial Councils—were paid from £4000 to £6250. All of them, whatever their rank on retirement, received a pension of £1,000 a year.<sup>3</sup> Those are high figures, but they were not extravagant in view of the fact that these men had to live in a remote and unhealthy country and often, since children could not be kept there long, to maintain two homes. Nor would men of their gifts and character have found it difficult as a rule to earn at least as much money in business or professional life in Britain. But in any case it was not mainly the material rewards that tempted them to commit themselves to exile for the best part of their lives.<sup>4</sup> It was the attractiveness of the work they would have to do. The great majority of them became District Officers, the men on each of whom lay the direct responsibility for the welfare of an area often larger than an English county and containing

<sup>1</sup> Governor-General Wellesley's Minute in Council, 18 August 1800.

<sup>2</sup> Lord Cromer, *Ancient and Modern Imperialism* (London, 1910), p. 76, note.

<sup>3</sup> Till about 1914, roughly one-quarter of the £1,000 represented the official's own annual contributions. A member of the I.C.S. who opted for the judicial branch of the service and became a High Court judge might obtain a pension up to £1,200 a year.

<sup>4</sup> The often-cited case of Macaulay was different. He was not, of course, a member of the I.C.S., but he accepted appointment as the first Law Member of the Governor-General's Council for five years principally, as he frankly admitted, in order to save enough money to devote himself on his return entirely to history. (Sir G. O. Trevelyan, *Life and Letters of Macaulay* (1911 ed.), 234, etc.)

perhaps a million or more inhabitants. Till, in relatively recent times, the administration became more elaborate, office work increased, and new social services were established with their own personnel, the District Officer's duties were not only of almost infinite variety, they brought him into personal contact with the poor and ignorant countryfolk entrusted to his care—looking after their humble needs, listening to their grievances, settling their disputes, advising on their crops, trying to persuade them to make their villages cleaner and healthier, and so forth. He knew it was good work he was doing, and he knew, too, that the countryfolk appreciated it. 'We are his children,' they would say of him: 'he is our *ma bap*, our mother and father.' And for the fortunate who rose to the top the sense of exercising this paternal power deepened with the broadening of its scope. It was a great thing to be responsible for directing and superintending the government of a Province—a country, it might be, of forty or fifty million people.

Next in importance to the I.C.S. was the Indian Police Service, now known as the I.P., who were recruited from much the same class as the I.C.S., but usually at the pre-university stage. Later came the new technical Services—education, agriculture, forestry, public works,<sup>1</sup> and so on—but, unlike the I.C.S. and I.P. which were mainly British in personnel, they soon contained a substantial proportion of Indians. And, ranking beneath these so-called Superior or All-India Services, were the multitudinous Provincial Services staffed entirely by Indians. The growth of nationalist agitation in course of time was bound to create the impression that the great bureaucracy it assailed was composed of foreigners; and foreigners, it is true, controlled it and held most of its key positions. But of its total personnel—in 1900, for example—over 500,000 were Indian and only about 4,000 British.

The British fraction might well have been even smaller: for, from about 1820 onwards, some of the ablest and most far-sighted British officials strongly criticised the policy of keeping all the higher administrative posts—those, in fact, that were held by the members of the I.C.S.—in British hands. Munro believed that the surest method of educating Indians for ultimate self-government was 'to give them a higher opinion of themselves by employing them in important situations and perhaps by rendering them eligible to almost every office under Government'.<sup>2</sup> 'I regret as

<sup>1</sup> The Indian Medical Service was an Army Service which lent many of its officers to the civil administration.

<sup>2</sup> Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 284.

deeply as you or any man can', wrote Malcolm to a friend, 'that there is no opening for natives. . . . We must, or we cannot last, continue to associate the natives with us in the task of rule and in the benefits and gratifications which accrue from it.'<sup>1</sup> Others stressed this point of expediency. All the high seats of power had been taken from Indians. Unless they were in some degree restored to them, were they not bound to resent more sharply the presence of the usurpers and to welcome more eagerly any opportunity of getting rid of them? Certainly that was one of the motives that combined to bring about the Mutiny. Certainly, too, the temper of the subsequent nationalist movement would have been less bitter and impatient if more members of the intelligentsia had been able to find scope for their patriotism and their abilities in public service rather than in agitation.

In principle the policy of 'Indianisation' was adopted at an early stage. The eighty-seventh clause of the Act of 1833—a 'noble clause' Macaulay called it—ran as follows:

No Native of the said Territories, nor any natural-born Subject of His Majesty resident therein, shall, by reason only of his religion, place of birth, descent, colour or any of them be disabled from holding any Place, Office, or Employment under the said Company.<sup>2</sup>

In the proclamation of 1858 which inaugurated the new post-Mutiny dispensation, Queen Victoria declared it to be her will

that, so far as may be, our subjects of whatever race or creed be freely and impartially admitted to offices in our service, the duties of which they may be qualified by their education, ability, and integrity duly to discharge.<sup>3</sup>

To fulfil this promise in the spirit as well as the letter a more whole-hearted effort was needed than the admission of Indians to the competitive examination for the I.C.S. in England (1858) or the nomination of Indians in India (1879). And that effort was not made. One Indian entered the I.C.S. in 1864, three more in 1871. As late as 1913 over 80 per cent. of the highest and best-paid posts in the civil service as a whole were still in British hands.<sup>4</sup>

This reluctance to associate Indians with the administration at its highest levels was not wholly due to British selfishness. There were far fewer educated Indians to choose from in the second half of the nineteenth century than there are now, and it was not

<sup>1</sup> Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 659.

<sup>2</sup> Muir, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 383.

<sup>4</sup> For the present figure, see p. 125 below.

unnatural that the British authorities in India should feel that the great administrative machine which they had made and in which they took a proper pride would not be run so well by Indians. There was also, at a later stage, the question of security. If the growth of a militant nationalism was from one standpoint an argument for Indianising the administration, from another it was an argument for maintaining its strength and unity.

### 3. LAW AND LIBERTY

If the bureaucracy of the British Raj was a kind of despotism, it was a very different kind from that which the Indian people had experienced before the British came.

In the first place, the British Raj was stronger than any of its predecessors, stronger even than the Mogul Empire, and this enabled it to keep India, as never before, safe from attack without and united and at peace within. The old menace of invasion was dispelled. No hostile army crossed the frontier till 1942.<sup>1</sup> The countryside was no longer swept from time to time by warring and rapacious hosts. The main highways were no longer infested by bands of brigands. Villagers could sleep of nights: their lives and property were safer now than they had ever been.

Secondly, the British Raj replaced arbitrary despotism by the rule of law. By becoming British subjects many millions of Indians acquired 'a government of laws, not of men', and therewith as full a protection of their personal rights by impersonal justice and as wide a measure of civil liberty as any people in the world enjoyed. As to the content of the law, the existing laws were consolidated and codified in accordance with 'the indisputable principle', as a British parliamentary committee put it, 'that the interests of the Native subjects are to be consulted in preference to those of Europeans whenever the two come into competition, and that therefore the laws ought to be adapted rather to the feelings and habits of the Natives than to those of Europeans'.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of English judicial procedure, it is sometimes argued, was unwise, since it was ill suited to the backward conditions of Indian country life. But otherwise the creation of the new courts of justice was an almost unqualified gain. They obtained, wrote an experienced Indian nationalist, 'a prestige and authority unknown in Asia'

<sup>1</sup> Pathan and Afghan raids in the north-west were not invasions in the normal sense.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1831-2, viii. 21.



outside the areas of European rule.<sup>1</sup> They planted in the Indian mind a new respect for law as something to which even the strongest Government must bow.<sup>2</sup> The value of this gift has yet to be put to its final proof; for it is on allegiance to a sovereign law that the peace and stability of the free India of the future must mainly depend.

Thirdly, the British Raj brought with it from the West certain standards of humanity which Indian society had not yet attained. Early action was taken to suppress female infanticide. After long hesitation and in the teeth of orthodox Hindu opposition, to aid and abet a performance of *suttee* was declared to be culpable homicide and, if it were involuntary, murder. The gangs of Thugs, who strangled harmless wayfarers in the service of the goddess Kali, were broken up. Human sacrifice, which had lingered on in some primitive hill districts, was stamped out. The slave trade was stifled, the legal status of slavery was abolished, and in 1860 the owning of slaves was finally prohibited.

Fourthly, while the British Raj withheld political liberty from the Indian people, it gave them civil liberty. It permitted and protected freedom of thought or opinion. In the matter of religion, in particular, all the communities, where they were in a minority as much as where they were in a majority, were free to profess their faith and to practise its rites and ceremonies.<sup>3</sup> Nor were they subjected to any propagandist pressure: for the Government scrupulously refrained—too scrupulously, some thought—from giving any official backing to Christian missions. With freedom of opinion went freedom to express it, in newspapers or books or on the public platform, and to form associations to expound it, with only those restrictions which, when Indian nationalism became militant and communal strife increased, seemed necessary to combat incendiary agitation.<sup>4</sup> It might, indeed, be a salutary experience for those critics who accept the 'extremist' picture of the British Raj as a tyranny scarcely distinguishable from Nazism

<sup>1</sup> S. K. Datta, *Asiatic Asia* (London, 1902), p. 129.

<sup>2</sup> A striking illustration of the power of the judiciary over the executive was afforded by the decision of the Federal Court in 1942 that a Rule had been so drafted by the Central Government as to be *ultra vires*. See R. Coupland, *Report on the Constitutional Problem in India* (Oxford, 1942-3, henceforth cited as *Report*), Part III, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Except such ritual practices as were inhumane or murderous, e.g., *suttee* and *thuggee*.

<sup>4</sup> The Acts for control of the press were needed and used more for repressing communal agitation than sedition. For the attitude of the Congress Provincial Governments of 1937-9 to these restrictions, see pp. 157-8 below.

to listen to the bitter speeches or to read the outspoken articles in which Indian politicians or journalists have long been accustomed to say what they think about their Government. In stressing the want of political liberty, the value of civil liberty for the great multitude of ordinary folk is apt to be forgotten.

It may be said, lastly, that, if the British Raj was not 'government by consent of the governed', it was government with their acquiescence. The proof of that lies in the fact that in a country not much smaller than Europe, with a population rising by the end of the nineteenth century towards 300 millions, there were only about 60,000 British soldiers and about 4,000 British officials. So small a 'garrison' would have been an absurdity if the mass of the Indian people had felt that British rule was intolerably unjust or inhumane. That they learned to believe in its justice has already been remarked. As to its humanity, by the normal standards of Western civilization, the record speaks for itself. There is only one serious stain on it since the repression of the Mutiny—the tragedy at Amritsar in 1919. In the spring of that year, when the Afghans were on the point of advancing on the frontier in the hope of raising the hillsmen and invading India, a wave of revolutionary turbulence ran through the Punjab.<sup>1</sup> Outbreaks of violence and disorder occurred in several towns. In Amritsar itself four Englishmen were murdered and an Englishwoman assaulted and left for dead. To General Dyer, to whom the civil officer had surrendered his authority, the situation seemed so critical that on learning that, in defiance of a proclamation he had issued, a crowd had collected in a walled enclosure in the town, he led a section of Gurkha soldiers to the spot, and, opening fire without warning, killed 379 and left some 1200 wounded on the ground. It was probably Dyer's estimate of the immediate local danger that prompted this conduct at the time, but he afterwards declared that he had intended to check the spread of rebellion throughout the Punjab by a deliberate act of terrorism. Some of his compatriots accepted and applauded this interpretation. Subscriptions were raised in India and in Britain to present him with an honorarium. But that was not the judgement of the authorities when, after a belated inquiry, the full facts were known. Dyer was deprived of his command and censured by the Government of India, the Commander-in-Chief in India, and the British Army Council. These measures were approved by the House of Commons after a tense debate in which the decisive speech was made by Mr. Churchill. He affirmed

<sup>1</sup> See p. 118 below.

that Dyer's action, in firing heavily on a mob which was armed only with bludgeons and was not attacking him, was contrary to the traditions of the British Army, and that in dealing with rebellion the idea of 'frightfulness' was 'absolutely foreign to the British way of doing things'.<sup>1</sup> Only the House of Lords, rejecting the urgent advice of all its most distinguished members, dissented by a majority from this view. The bulk of British public opinion agreed with Sir Valentine Chirol, the doyen of British journalism at that time, when he wrote: 'It is difficult to believe that General Dyer's faith, however honestly held, in the expediency of preventive massacre in order to forestall possible or even probable and grave trouble will ever commend itself to the British people.'<sup>2</sup>

'The shadow of Amritsar', said the Duke of Connaught, when he went out to inaugurate the new constitution in 1921, 'lengthened over the whole of India.' And, if the shock occasioned by the tragic incident was severe, it was also significant. It was a kind of tribute to the character of a government under which nothing like that had happened since Mutiny days. It was a tacit recognition of the fact that there was a moral as well as a material sanction behind the British Raj. It accorded with Mr. Churchill's claim that 'our reign in India or anywhere else has never stood on the basis of physical force alone'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *India*. Speeches by the Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill (London, 1931), pp. 15-28.

<sup>2</sup> *India* (London, 1926), p. 210. More wounding to Indian pride than the firing was Dyer's so-called 'crawling order', compelling Indians who passed along the street in which the Englishwoman had been assaulted to do so on all fours. This order was disapproved of by the Punjab Government and soon withdrawn. The details of the whole affair may be found in the Report of the Disorders Inquiry (Hunter) Committee, 1920. For a sober summary by an American writer, see W. R. Smith, *Nationalism and Reform in India* (New Haven, 1938), pp. 235-43.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 26.

## II

### The Economic Aspect

#### I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

NEXT to the maintenance of security and the establishment of law and order, the British Government was confronted with the huge task of providing India with the material equipment of a modern state. It was a poor country. Nine-tenths of its people were engaged in wringing a bare subsistence from the soil; there were relatively few towns; and the rural districts—so few and bad were the roads—were virtually isolated from one another and still more from the outer world. Production was mainly for local consumption. Recurrent shortages in the local rainfall meant starvation on a ghastly scale.

The first immediate economic need—and it was no less required for strategic and administrative purposes—was a better system of communications. Already before the Mutiny new trunk roads and innumerable lesser roads and bridges had been built, steamship services provided on the greater rivers, ports enlarged and improved, and the construction of railways begun; and with the railways came the telegraph and a cheap and uniform postal service.

The second immediate need was irrigation—to combat drought and to improve the yield and extend the area of cultivation—and even more impressive than the spread of the network of rails and wires over India was the cutting of canals through its thirsty sun-baked soil. By 1900 India possessed far the greatest system of irrigation in the world. Before the present war more than 32 million acres of British India were watered by Government works. Large areas, especially in the dry north-west, which had been nothing but arid wilderness, were transformed into fertile crop-land, and on much of it hundreds of thousands of peasants from overcrowded districts found new homes and means of livelihood.

Railways and canals facilitated the task of grappling with famine. Besides direct measures for the relief of destitution and unemployment, it was possible now to bring surplus food in bulk from more fortunate areas. 'Famine policy' became one of the major preoccupations of the Central and Provincial Governments, till the inevitably recurring periods of excessive drought no longer meant, as hitherto they had so often meant, that the population of

whole districts was confronted with beggary and starvation. The catastrophe in Bengal in 1943<sup>1</sup> was a grim reminder of the fate which earlier generations had regularly undergone and of the foresight and efficiency and public spirit needed to avert it.

Meantime the country as a whole was undergoing an economic revolution. In the first place the new political unity of India, or at least of British India, was reflected in a new economic unity. Innumerable local barriers to trade were swept away, and British India—so unlike Europe—became one great area of free trade. In the second place the introduction of Western business methods, the creation of a modern banking system, the development of commercial law, together with the building of the railways and the expansion of sea transport, brought all India for the first time into the complex of world economics. The isolation of the countryside was broken down. The price of the peasant's produce rose from its poor local level to those prevailing in India as a whole and even overseas. After the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which reduced the length of the voyage to Europe to about one-quarter of what it had been round the Cape, Indian wheat could be sold in the world-market at a world-price. And new developments in primary production became possible and profitable. Plantations, once limited to indigo, were extended to coffee and tea. The growth of jute kept pace with its fast-growing manufacture. That the financing and management of this new enterprise were mainly British accorded with nineteenth-century notions of free trade and *laissez-faire*. It was not the Government's doing. There was no such alliance between Government and commerce as has become a familiar feature of the modern world. The officials left to the 'box-wallahs' a business that was no business of theirs. Even the social gulf of an earlier day in England remained unbridged. But, if British bankers and shopkeepers and planters were not assisted by the Government, they could invest their money and run their own concerns in India on the same sort of terms as in Argentina, say, or China. Naturally they retained most of the profit, which in some lines was very high, but not all of it. Salaries and wages were mainly Indian-earned: the bulk of the staff in banks and business, the whole of the labour force on the plantations, was Indian. Nor, of course, was all the new economic development in British hands. Old Indian firms could now enjoy that security throughout all India which in the days of anarchy they had only enjoyed within the British settlements: rich Parsi merchants in

<sup>1</sup> See p. 226 below.

Bombay, rich Hindu merchants in Calcutta, grew richer still; and in course of time the Indian business world, aided by the experience and technique of British pioneers, was able both to launch out on its own and also to obtain an increasing share in the control and the profits of British firms. To-day the major part of the capital invested in joint-stock companies is passing from British into Indian hands.

One result of the new economic order was a steady rise in the value of India's export trade. In 1834 it had been under £8 millions. In 1855 it was roughly £23 millions, in 1870 £53, in 1900 £69, in 1910 £137, in 1928 £250. The goods exported were now mostly primary products—jute, cotton, grains and pulse, hides, oil-seeds, minerals—for India had been caught in the economic currents which the Industrial Revolution in the West had sent running all over the world. In the old days Indian yarns and calico, mainly produced by village craftsmen, had been exchanged for British bullion. Now in India, as earlier in Britain, village industries were doomed to a swift and steep decline by the growth of the factories. This would presumably have been their fate if the British had never come to India. Indian capitalism was not imported from abroad, and sooner or later Indian capitalists would have built the mills which now supply most of the cloth that Indians need. But, till that happened, it was mainly British yarn or cloth that swamped the Indian market. Other manufactures were also pouring in, not only the lighter goods, but the heavy stuff needed for the railways and other engineering works and presently for the equipment of Indian industry. Hence the value of India's imports rose beside that of the exports. In 1834 it was roughly £4½ millions, in 1855 £13½, in 1870 £33½, in 1900 £51, in 1910 £86, in 1928 £190.

The volume of British trade with India in this period ranged between one-fifth and one-seventh of the volume of all Britain's overseas trade, and it constituted a much larger share of India's overseas trade than that enjoyed by any other nation. This was the 'natural' result of the Raj—of the connexion it had established between India and Britain, of the use of the English language it promoted, of its linking up of Indian with British currency, and so forth. It was not the result of any 'unnatural' aids or restrictions. No more in the nineteenth than in the seventeenth century was there any attempt at a monopoly. Nor did the British Government—with one exception to be noted presently—try to foster British trade by such means as most other Western Govern-

ments have employed to foster their trade with backward countries under their control. From 1894 till 1923 imports into India were normally subjected to a general revenue duty which varied from time to time between 5 and 15 per cent. Wherever they came from, they paid the same: there was no preference. Exports from India similarly went freely where they would. It was the policy of the 'open door' both ways. The extent to which Britain's commercial rivals availed themselves of their opportunity is shown by the following figures:

PERCENTAGES OF EXPORTS (VALUE) FROM INDIA

		<i>To the United Kingdom</i>	<i>To other parts of the British Empire</i>	<i>To Foreign Countries</i>
1870	. .	54	20	26
1890	. .	33	23	44
1910	. .	26	17	57

• PERCENTAGES OF IMPORTS (VALUE) INTO INDIA

		<i>From the United Kingdom</i>	<i>From other parts of the British Empire</i>	<i>From Foreign Countries</i>
1870	. .	85	6	9
1890	. .	70	15	15
1910	. .	61	8	31

For most of this period it was generally held that India benefited from British homage to the doctrine of Free Trade. It meant cheap rates for the consumer. The free import of Lancashire cotton goods, for example, from 1882 to 1894 enabled Indian countryfolk to obtain better material than they could get at the same price from Indian mills. But it was realised, as time went on, that the need for industrial development was only second to the need for the improvement of agricultural technique to provide the means of livelihood for a growing population; and in India large-scale industrial development was impossible without fiscal protection against the overwhelming flood of Western goods. The situation, in fact, was similar to that which had arisen at about the same time in those 'young' countries of the British Commonwealth which were not content to exchange their corn and meat and dairy produce for European manufactures and wanted to create a better balance of their economic life by manufacturing themselves. But there was a vital difference. The concession of responsible government to those countries meant that on any issue of

direct domestic concern they could have their own way. When, for example, in 1858-9 the Canadian Finance Minister raised his tariff in order to protect the infant industries of Canada from British and American competition, he met the protests of the British Colonial Secretary, backed by British manufacturers, with the firm assertion that a self-governing Canada must govern herself. A self-governing India would certainly have taken the same line.

India was to obtain her fiscal autonomy in course of time, but not before the difference in her political status had been harshly underlined by the sorry business of the excise duties. When the old low revenue-tariff was restored in 1894, the Lancashire manufacturers, who sent one-quarter of their cotton-goods to India, insisted that a countervailing excise must be levied on the products of Indian cotton-mills. They appealed to the principle of free competition, but they could not argue, as the Free Trade statesmen of an earlier day had honestly argued, that their policy was as much in the interests of Indian consumers as of British producers. On that point the British authorities in India had no doubts; but, at a time when the balance of parties in the House of Commons was fairly even, the voting power of the Lancashire members proved decisive, and Governor-General Elgin and his colleagues were overruled—one of the very few occasions on which such overruling from Whitehall has occurred in a matter of first-rate importance. The final upshot was the reduction of the import duty on cloth to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., the imposition of an excise duty of  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. on all cloth produced in Indian mills, and the exemption of yarn from both import and excise duties. It was a short-sighted policy, for it did more than anything else to strengthen Indian distrust of British motives and impair the goodwill on which in the long run all trade depends.<sup>1</sup>

At the time the duties were imposed, the political situation which made it possible had already begun to change; and a few years later, as will be recorded in a subsequent chapter, India began to tread the Colonial path towards self-government. In 1917 the development of responsible government was declared to be the aim of British policy, and soon afterwards, as if in anticipation of its ultimate issue in Dominion status, India was conceded a substantial measure of fiscal autonomy.<sup>2</sup> The immediate

<sup>1</sup> The import duties on cotton goods were presently raised to 11 per cent., while the excise duty remained at  $3\frac{1}{2}$ . The latter was suspended in 1925 and abolished in 1926.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 126 below.



result was the erection of a discriminatory protective tariff. It was naturally directed, like the Canadian tariff, at British no less than foreign imports—in combination with the raising of revenue duties after the war, it ruined several firms in Lancashire and threw thousands of operatives out of work—and under its shield the pace of the industrial development which was already afoot soon quickened. In 1890 there were only some 700 registered factories in India. In 1939 there were over 10,000, employing nearly two million workers. And they were not only engaged on cotton, jute, leather, ceramics, and a multitude of light goods but in heavy industry too. The Tata Company, financed and controlled by Indians and fed with Indian ore and Indian coal, began to produce steel in 1912, and it now produces more steel and iron than any other firm in any part of the British Empire—a portent of great significance for the future of Asia.

One other feature of the new dispensation calls for mention. It was agreed in 1921 that in the making of Government purchases overseas India could not be treated as 'a tied-house for British industry' and that such purchases should be made in the cheapest market. Substantial orders were subsequently placed in continental European countries—an order for locomotives in Germany, for example. In 1935, 51 per cent. of India's imports came from foreign countries and 39 per cent. from Britain, and 54 per cent. of India's exports went to foreign countries and 31½ per cent. to Britain—the residue in each case falling to other parts of the British Empire. As far, then, as fiscal policy is concerned and save only in that matter of the excise duties, the British Raj cannot fairly be branded as an example of 'economic imperialism'.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. PUBLIC FINANCE

The poverty of the Indian people is betrayed by the relatively small amount of money that can be raised from them by taxation. In 1932, for example, the revenue of Britain with a population of about 45 millions was about £870 millions; the revenue of British India—Central and Provincial together—with a population of nearly 300 millions was about £160 millions.

That great system of railways and canals could never have been

<sup>1</sup> The preferential policy adopted by the Ottawa Conference in 1932 (at which India was represented in her own right) was not 'imperialist' in the sense that it was intended to profit Britain at the expense of other parts of the Empire. It has been calculated that its relatively small effect on Britain's trade with India was more to India's advantage than Britain's.

financed from such a relatively meagre revenue. Loans were plainly needed, and they were obtained by issues of Government of India stock on the British and the Indian market. The former was known as 'sterling debt', the latter as 'rupee debt'. Up to the outbreak of the last war, the average rate of interest on both was only about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per cent., because Indian administration was under the ultimate control of the Secretary of State and Parliament. Japan, for instance, could not hope to get such favourable terms: the average charge on her overseas public debt was  $5\frac{1}{2}$  per cent. Moreover, the debt incurred on the railways (most of which were built by private companies with a Government guarantee to begin with, but were successively bought up by Government in course of time) and on the canals (which, apart from one or two minor and unsuccessful private ventures, were a Government concern from the outset) proved to be 'productive' debt. The canals quite soon, the railways more slowly, began to yield profits higher than the interest charges. Thus India has been in a fortunate position with regard to the bulk of her National Debt—an almost unique position, since few other countries can have such a very high proportion of their public debt secured by productive assets—and it has been still further improved in the course of the present war. The 'sterling debt', the part owed to Britain, which amounted in 1937 to £357 millions,<sup>1</sup> has now been 'repatriated' against the sterling received on account of the British Government's large expenditure for war purposes in India. The financial roles have thus been reversed. Owing to the cost of the war in South-East Asia, Britain is now heavily in debt to India.

The normal requirements of administration could not be met so easily by loans; and, if much has been left undone that wanted doing, the main reason has been that there was not money enough to do it. The chief source of revenue, till twenty years ago, was the land. The British Government inherited from the Indian rulers they supplanted the traditional right to acquire, as ultimate owners of the soil, a proportion of its yield. This rent or tax had normally been levied in kind—one-third of the gross produce was a customary rate under the later Moguls—but it was now all levied in cash; and for this purpose an elaborate process of assessment and periodical re-assessment was carried out. At the end of the nineteenth century it was roughly reckoned that the average tax on an acre was not more than one-tenth of the value of its yield or about two shillings a year. After the land tax, which in those days provided

<sup>1</sup> Including railway liabilities taken over by the Secretary of State.

over one-quarter of the revenue, came the net receipts from Government-owned railways and irrigation works when they began to pay and from the telegraph and postal system. Next came taxes on salt and duties and profits on opium, each providing somewhat less than 10 per cent.<sup>1</sup> The first could only be defended on the ground that salt is the sole taxable commodity in universal use; but for that reason it presses on the poor. Though it has been estimated to have cost the Indian peasant only between twopence-halfpenny and fivepence a year, an increase in the rate has invariably resulted in a decrease of consumption. To tax opium needed no defence, but, since the early years of the nineteenth century, that source of revenue has been greatly diminished by the decision to prohibit the export of opium to China and to restrict its export elsewhere to medical purposes. Excise duties on spirits and drugs realised about 6 per cent. of the revenue, stamps about 5 per cent. Owing to the maintenance of free trade, the customs duties, which in the years preceding the present war accounted for 20 per cent., produced only about 2 per cent.<sup>2</sup> Another 2 per cent. was raised by income tax which, till the last war, was levied at a very low rate and from which, since land is otherwise taxed, agricultural incomes are still exempt in most of the Provinces.

The heaviest item of expenditure has always been defence. The Indian Army—in which the Company's sepoy troops were consolidated and reorganised—was maintained at a peace-time strength of about 150,000. Its main task has been the protection of the north-west frontier against the sturdy, fanatical and bellicose Pathans who had been accustomed in earlier days to make up for the poverty of their rocky hill-country by raiding the plains along the Indus. Intermittent warfare was unavoidable, but the frequency of costly little frontier campaigns became a matter of controversy both between those British experts who held different views as to the line on which the frontier should be stabilised and between Indian nationalists and the British Government. But the sharpest criticism of defence policy was the use it made of the Indian Army outside India. Between 1858 and 1914 Indian troops served on a large scale in the second Afghan War (1878–80) and the third Burman War (1885), and on a smaller scale in Perak (1875), in Egypt (1882), in the Sudan (1885 and 1896), in South Africa (1899–1902) and in China (1900–1). To Indian critics it seemed that,

<sup>1</sup> The budget of 1891 has been taken as a sample for these and subsequent figures.

<sup>2</sup> In 1891. In 1921 the proportion had grown to 11 per cent.

in some of those cases at any rate, the defence of India was only distantly or indirectly involved, and in course of time it became a common charge that Indian lives were sacrificed to 'imperial adventures'. And Indian money too: for the cost of the Indian troops on the earlier of those campaigns was borne by Indian taxpayers.<sup>1</sup> In the World Wars of our own day the security of India has been directly threatened, and her contributions to their cost (about £140 millions in the first war, a vastly larger sum in the second) have been contributions to her own self-defence. At the same time, in each of the two wars, the maintenance of the Indian Army outside India has been paid for by the British Government. Shortly before 1939, moreover, the British Government undertook to bear three-quarters of the cost of modernising and mechanising the Indian Army or about £25 millions. It must also be borne in mind that India paid only a relatively small subsidy (about £130,000 a year) towards the cost of the protection to her shores and trade afforded by the British Navy. The self-governing Colonies had paid such subsidies before they attained Dominion Status and built up their own navies; and in 1938, in accordance with Dominion precedent, India ceased to pay the subsidy on undertaking to establish a squadron of modern sloops.

On the eve of the recent war the proportion of total British Indian revenues spent on defence was no longer quite so high as it had been in the nineteenth century, but it was still about 25 per cent. When the cost of administrative salaries and pensions and of debt charges and of roads and bridges and other public works was added, there was no room for high expenditure on social services. In education, for example, an attempt by the State to do in India what it had begun to do in Europe in the later nineteenth century would have entailed an outlay far beyond its means. A good deal was done. There are now fifteen universities in India, over 300 colleges, over 3,000 high schools. In 1939 over eleven million children were attending primary schools. But a system of universal primary education—the provision and upkeep of innumerable village schools, the training and payment of a host of teachers in

<sup>1</sup> Indian nationalists also complained that the cost of recruiting and training British troops before they were stationed in India for its defence was charged on Indian revenues. This matter was settled in 1933 when the British Government undertook to pay £1½ millions (raised in 1939 to £2 millions) in relief of Indian defence expenditure on the ground that (a) the British forces in India were ready for action in an emergency, especially in the Far East, and (b) they obtained in India a training for active service unobtainable elsewhere.

the various vernaculars—has been financially impossible. The cost would have run into hundreds of millions sterling, and the amount assigned to education from public funds in 1939 was about £13 millions.<sup>1</sup>

Economists are now maintaining that public expenditure need not be determined by the taxable capacity of the people; but this is a novel doctrine, and hitherto British control of Indian, as of British, finance has been strictly orthodox. Budgets have been balanced. 'Cut thy coat according to thy cloth' has been the motto. Borrowing, except for 'productive' purposes, has been severely restricted. And on those assumptions it has never been possible to achieve a better counterpoise between the cost of defence and administration and the cost of social services. It is arguable, indeed, that India under the British Raj has obtained a more highly organised system of defence than was necessary, and a more efficient and elaborate administration than so poor and backward a country could properly afford.

### 3. THE PROBLEM OF POVERTY

The closer association of India with the commerce of the world, the great increase in her total production and in the volume of her export and import trade, the ultimate development of industries—all this should seemingly have meant a corresponding advance in the general standard of living. But it did not. For several reasons the mass of the Indian people remained desperately poor. In the first place the growth of population, no longer checked by constant warfare and anarchy and disease and recurrent famine, steadily quickened. Between 1881 and 1931 the population of all India increased by about 85 millions. At the census of 1941 it was nearly 390 millions. It is over 400 by now, and climbing higher at the rate of five or six millions a year. That is a highly disquieting fact because the increase in the number of people has not been accompanied, as in the Western world, by a corresponding increase in their productive capacity per head. That is the primary reason why the great majority of them are still near to that bare subsistence level at which they stood a century ago.

But why, it will be asked, did productive capacity remain so

<sup>1</sup> The proposals for the education of all boys and girls from 6 to 14 years of age recently submitted to the Central Government are reckoned, when fully operative, to require 1,800,000 teachers and to cost over £200 millions per annum. *Hansard*, H. of C., vol. 402, no. 116 (28 July 1944), cols. 1119-20.

stunted? The answer to that question is more complex. It was partly due to the slow and relatively slight development of large-scale industry, the means by which the prosperous countries of the West were able to absorb their growing populations and to increase the value of their individual output. But India could never have become a predominantly industrial country like Britain or Belgium: the bulk of her people had to be employed on the land; and in the last analysis the economic backwardness of India is inseparable from the backwardness of Indian agriculture. For that, unhappily, there was no easy remedy. For it was not only due to the ignorance and conservatism of the Indian peasant or to insecure tenures and inequitable rents in those parts of the country in which 'landlordism' still prevailed, or to the customary 'fragmentation' of agricultural holdings. It was also due to the rigid traditions of Indian society. If caste and the Hindu family system encourage fellowship and mutual help between their members, they also tend to discourage individual initiative; and there is no economic activity in India that has not been impaired, directly or indirectly, by the seclusion and subordination of women, both Moslem and Hindu. The custom, again, of costly marriage ceremonies and high dowries has involved the Hindu peasant in a load of debt so strangling that most of what he can produce above the mere means of life is appropriated by the moneylender—a fate to which the Moslem peasant, too, has usually succumbed. Religion, also, has obstructed progress: the Hindu veneration of the cow virtually prohibits the development of a successful pastoral industry. And behind those checks and drawbacks of Indian creed and custom lies the lack of vitality due to disease and an insufficient or ill-balanced diet.

But, when all is said, the main cause of Indian poverty remains the high birth-rate. More Indians have been born than India could comfortably maintain. All the efforts that have been made to enhance productive capacity—by irrigation, by improvements in agricultural technique, by sanitation, by industrial development—have been swamped by the rising flood of human beings; and it is hard to believe that the far-reaching schemes now being canvassed for raising the standard of Indian life can prove more than partially successful unless somehow the birth-rate is reduced.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear from the foregoing that it lay beyond the power of an alien Government to grapple with the root causes of Indian poverty. It might have done more to hasten the growth of indus-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 228 below.

try. It might have done more to protect the tenant from the landlord and the moneylender. But, being an alien Government, it could not launch a direct attack on the religious convictions or social traditions or domestic habits of its subjects. That is one reason for welcoming the transfer of political power from British to Indian hands if it can be safely and honourably made: for the change of methods and habits and outlook on life among the multitude of Indian countryfolk, without which India can never be prosperous, must be the work of Indians.

### III

## Balance Sheet

#### I. GAIN AND LOSS

THE connexion between Britain and India has been much more than a matter of politics and economics. It has furnished an example of 'culture contact' on a vast scale; and, though the influence of British political ideas on Indian minds can be easily detected and defined, the same cannot be said about the impact on Indian life of all that is meant by Western civilisation or the counter-reaction of Indian on British thought or the effect of the personal relations between innumerable Britons and Indians. A scientific attempt, indeed, to assess the worth of the British Raj to each of the two countries would involve so many imponderable factors that it might well daunt the most self-confident investigator. The whole subject, moreover, is nowadays highly controversial. For a long time to come no two verdicts, especially if one is British and the other Indian, are likely to be the same. However objective they may try to be, British and Indian patriots must view the picture from different angles and be affected in some degree by an inescapable, if unconscious, bias. Yet some judgement, however rough and cursory and limited in scope, must needs be ventured here: for no one can understand the theme of the forthcoming chapters—the process of India's liberation—unless he has formed some opinion as to the nature and results of India's subjection and the gains and losses it has involved for both the countries concerned.

The British balance sheet is the easier to compile. Nearly all the main items are on the credit side, and their value is indisputable. First, the British occupation of India has provided a strategic base, protecting the 'life-line' of the Empire, by sea and air, across the Indian Ocean from Aden to Singapore and on to Australia and New Zealand. Secondly, India has been one of the safest fields of British overseas investment and trade. Thirdly, though, as has just been said, the effect of the connexion between Britain and India on the culture of each country cannot be precisely measured and though it has clearly been much stronger and more pervasive in India, yet it has been by no means negligible in Britain. The modern sciences of comparative philology and comparative religion were founded on the study of the Hindu



classics. British archaeologists and historians have quarried in Indian soil; and British literature and art have been more influenced than is generally realised by Indian poetry, painting and sculpture.<sup>1</sup> Fourthly, the Raj has offered to successive generations of young Englishmen an attractive, honourable and well-paid career in the Indian civil and military services. Against that last item must be set the loss which British life has suffered, in administration and politics, in the professions and business, through the exile of so much ability and integrity and capacity for leadership. But otherwise there is nothing substantial to put on the debit side. The Raj has certainly fulfilled the first of the two purposes which Pitt assigned to it in 1784—‘to confirm and enlarge the advantages derived by this country from its connexion with India’. And in so far as it has also fulfilled the second purpose—‘to render that connexion a blessing to the native Indians’—there has been moral as well as material gain. Since the days when Burke told them that they had a duty to do in India, the British people have certainly tried to do it. ‘Few governments’, wrote J. S. Mill, who was no chauvinist, ‘have attempted so much for the good of their subjects’;<sup>2</sup> and much more has been attempted since Mill’s day than was conceivable before it. There have been shortcomings, of course, and blunders; but it is the general British belief, and it has become part of the British national tradition, that the record of the Raj, though it has one or two black pages, is on the whole a record of which the British people have sober reason to be proud. Whatever may be said in the dust and heat of recent controversy, they need not fear the eventual verdict of cold history.

The major benefits which the Raj has bestowed on India are also plain. First and foremost, it has not only safeguarded India, as never before, from recurrent attack from without; it has also given her that internal unity, political and economic, which is the natural response to her physical unity, but which for centuries past she had never attained for any length of time. Secondly, British rule has been the rule of law. It has protected the rights of individuals and communities more fully and impartially than any previous régime, and fostered a sense of allegiance to the sovereignty of law. Thirdly, it has brought the economic life of India out of its almost medieval isolation into the network of modern

<sup>1</sup> For a concise treatment of this subject by H. G. Rawlinson, see *Modern India and the West* (ed. L. S. S. O’Malley, London, 1941), chap. xv.

<sup>2</sup> *Parliamentary Papers*, 1857–8, xliii. 35.

world-economy; and the material profit of this revolution, though much of it has been taken by British business and though it has not much relieved the poverty of the great rural majority of the Indian people, has been increasingly shared by all other classes of Indian society. Fourthly, the closer connexion with the West involved in British rule has made it easier for the Indian intelligentsia to draw, for what it was worth to them, on the storehouse of Western culture, the science, philosophy, art and literature of all the Western world.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the credit side of the account. On the debit side stand all the disadvantages inherent in the one hard fact that British rule has been foreign rule.

## 2. THE NATIONALIST AUDIT

It is only in relatively recent times that India's political subjection has come to be regarded by most Indian politicians as completely upsetting the balance of gain and loss to India resulting from the British Raj. Till some sixty years ago the drawbacks of foreign rule seemed outweighed by the benefits it brought with it, and not least the opportunity it gave to Indians to outgrow it and dispense with it by providing the framework and the training needed for self-government. At one time, indeed, educated Indian opinion may be said to have been too pro-British. It was not only in politics that the British way of doing things was accepted as the obvious model for an inexperienced India: there was a tendency to decry the whole historic tradition of Indian life and thought and to hold that India could only recover her place in the world by turning her back on her past and acquiring to the fullest possible extent the practical virtues of the West. This soon provoked a healthy reaction, but there were other reasons for the growth of a more critical appraisal of the British Raj. In the first place the value of its greatest gifts—external security and internal unity—was apt to be forgotten or underestimated as the conditions of Indian life before the British took control faded from living memory. The peril of invasion was no more thought about in India than in Britain till the catastrophes of 1940 and 1942 brought it so sensationally near. It needed, similarly, the widening of the communal gulf after 1937, the raising of the banner of Pakistan, the sombre talk of civil war, to recall the disruption and anarchy

<sup>1</sup> On this point, as indeed on all points, it is instructive to compare what happened in subject India with what happened in free China.

which preceded the British Raj. The *Pax Britannica*, in fact, external and internal, was taken for granted, and it was not recognised that united India, since the Mutiny at any rate, had escaped the fate of disunited Europe, smitten by constant war and exposed in peace to the assaults of economic nationalism. The second reason for a change of attitude towards the British Raj went deeper. It was not so much forgetfulness of what it had given to India as a new awareness of what it had not given. With the growth of Indian nationalism—itsself (as will be explained later on) made possible by the Raj—there was bound to grow a feeling of impatience with the notion of training for self-government. Quickened by the gathering strength of nationalism all over the world and particularly by its struggles and successes in other Asiatic countries in the opening decades of the twentieth century, this impatience soon became the dominant emotion in the hearts of most educated Indians. Freedom as a far-off goal was no longer enough. They wanted it not only for their sons but for themselves. And it was not so much with the backward state of India that they felt impatient now: it was with the British Raj. Once regarded as the means of attaining self-government, it seemed now the only obstacle that barred the way to it.

This intensification of nationalist feeling unhappily gave a new importance to what has been the most regrettable feature of the Raj. It is one of the major problems of world society, not by any means confined to India, that white men often find it hard not to feel and to betray a sense of superiority to coloured men. It is particularly hard where the white men are the rulers and the coloured men are subject to their rule. And it stands to the credit of those Englishmen who, holding the higher posts in the administration, have been the actual rulers in India that, with few exceptions, in their personal relations with Indians they have—to use a phrase that has not yet lost its meaning—behaved like gentlemen. If, being British, they have been stiff and undemonstrative and have tended to keep themselves to themselves, there have been many cases of close and equal friendship between them and their Indian colleagues. Outside official circles, too, strong personal ties have been knit—between officers of the Indian Army and their subordinates, between teachers and pupils, between partners in work or play. Nor have these good traditions been seriously impaired by the growth of Indian nationalism and the bitter hostility with which its spokesmen have from time to time assailed the British record. Often, indeed, those Englishmen who

have least sympathised with Indian aspirations have been most considerate of Indian feelings. Unfortunately, however, Englishmen in India have not all been gentlemen, whether by upbringing or nature; too many of them—and of Englishwomen also—have claimed from Indians, whatever their respective stations in life, a deference inconceivable on any grounds but those of race and, worse still, have sometimes enforced the claim with unpardonable insolence. Such conduct, it need hardly be said, has always been sternly reprobated by the authorities; but public opinion in the British community at large has failed to make it impossible for such things to happen; and there was one notorious occasion on which the lesson in race-relations taught by those petty individual incidents was driven home collectively. In 1883, when the liberal-minded Governor-General Ripon sponsored a bill which made it possible for a British resident in India to be tried by an Indian for a criminal offence, the storm raised by the unofficial British community was so violent that Ripon was constrained to bow to it and amend the bill. No doubt, in all the circumstances, some such agitation was inevitable—there have been similar reactions to similar situations in other parts of the world—but few of those who took part in it seem to have realised or cared what conclusions educated Indians were bound to draw.<sup>1</sup>

Such demonstrations of a claim to racial superiority became more intolerable as nationalism strengthened its hold on Indian minds. For the principle of equal status for all nations, great and small, is the cardinal doctrine of nationalism in revolt; and the main reason why an Indian patriot longs for India's freedom is that he resents the inferior position which, despite her ancient civilisation and historic past, she now occupies in the society of nations. If this is natural, so also is the patriot's tendency to shy away from the plain fact that that inferior position must needs have been the result, in some degree at any rate, of Indian weaknesses. Naturally, too, a sense of wounded pride may carry him further. He may persuade himself that India was enjoying a millennium before the British came and that her failure to take her

<sup>1</sup> The present writer recalls this subject of relations between Englishmen and Indians cropping up in the course of conversation with three leading Indian nationalists. The first, a politician, spoke with evident emotion of an Englishman who had been like a father to him in his early days and whose portrait was hanging on the wall. The second, a lawyer, spoke bitterly of how his father had once been hustled from a railway carriage by an Englishman who wanted it to himself. The third, an industrialist, had never forgotten that, when he was a young clerk in a British firm, he had not been allowed to use the lift because he was an Indian.

due place in the modern world as a free, united, prosperous nation has been Britain's fault. It is this attitude of mind, more emotional than realistic, that accounts for the transformation of the old ideas about the British Raj in the course of the last fifty years. The balance sheet was re-audited; and now the items on the credit side seemed not only dwarfed by the one great debit item of subjection, their intrinsic value was questioned and written down. India, no doubt, had been protected from invasion, but at an unbearable cost. The British, no doubt, united India, but this was the almost automatic result of the development of modern transport which synchronised with the growth of British rule. That communal peace had been imposed by a neutral British administration was an illusion. The Hindu-Moslem gulf, in particular, had grown wider; the British indeed, it was ultimately asserted, had deliberately widened it on the principle of 'divide and rule'. If the economic development of India was mainly Britain's work, its profits had gone mainly into British pockets; and India had been impoverished by the steady 'drain' of wealth to Britain—the salaries and pensions of British civilians and officers, the debt charges, the proceeds of British business—and by what was called 'the "City's" stranglehold on high finance'. Embittered patriots came to believe that it would have been better that India's natural resources should have lain untouched and undeveloped until Indians had acquired the capacity to exploit them entirely by themselves. And the reaction penetrated finally into the realm of culture. Contact with Western materialism had soiled the spiritual texture of Indian thought and life. Even the English language had been no boon. It was as harmful as it was degrading for a country which had been civilised ages before Europe to adopt a foreign *lingua franca* for its multilingual people.<sup>1</sup> To cool-headed observers there seemed to be a good deal of exaggeration and make-believe in this revaluation of the British Raj. But not all Indian nationalists were cool-headed. Some of them, indeed, came to feel in the end so acute a sense of humiliation and impotence that any fate for India—disruption, civil war, chaos—seemed preferable to the continuation of the Raj.

The reaction could go no further, but it must not be supposed that all Indian patriots went so far. Many of them, while desiring no less ardently that India should be free, regarded her subjection

<sup>1</sup> In an address at Benares University in 1942 Mr. Gandhi praised the Japanese for 'learning the best of the West through their own language'. *Leader*, 23 January 1942.

as not insufferable because it was not to be permanent. Their attitude to the British Raj would doubtless have been the same as that of the more militant nationalists if Britain had not been true to her liberal tradition and set on foot a gradual process of constitutional advance which, sooner or later, would lead to full self-government. As it was, they saw the process moving, slowly at first, but presently with gathering momentum, till at last only one short stretch lay between them and their goal. Plainly, it seemed to them, the revolutionists' cry that Britain was tightening her 'imperial grip' on India was false: plainly she was loosening it.

## Part Three

# THE PROCESS OF LIBERATION

### I

## The Problem of Self-Government

### I. THE STARTING-POINT

NEITHER British statesmen at home nor British officials on the spot seem ever to have supposed that India would always be subjected to the British Raj. Even while they were engaged in making it, they were contemplating its end. Governor-General Hastings in 1818, Thomas Munro in 1824, Henry Lawrence in 1844—to mention only three outstanding names—assumed that British rule would sooner or later be withdrawn; and in 1833 Macaulay, speaking in the House of Commons on the British Government's behalf, declared that the day when India had acquired a capacity and desire for self-government would be 'the proudest day in English history'.<sup>1</sup> But none of these prophets, with the possible exception of Hastings, imagined that India's liberation would come quickly. They took for granted that Britain would never willingly abandon India to the anarchy and misrule from which she had rescued her and therefore that British control must be maintained until Indians were able, as Munro put it, 'to frame a regular government for themselves and to conduct and preserve it'. That implied some effective measure of stability within India and of security from external attack; it implied the rule of law; and to most British minds it also implied that the people should have a voice in the enactment and administration of the law. Hence the need for a period of 'enlightenment', of training for self-government; and to most of the men who stood close to the facts of Indian life as they were when the British Raj began the end of that period was bound to seem a long way off.

Meantime, it was agreed, Britain would have to play the role of benevolent despot in India—a paradoxical role for a country which prided itself on its old-established parliamentary institutions and its great tradition of resistance to autocracy in Europe. Macaulay frankly admitted the paradox in that famous speech of 1833. He

<sup>1</sup> Document 2, p. 291 below.

was introducing a bill for the better government of India drafted by Whig Ministers on the morrow of their triumph in 1832, but he could not claim that, like other ministerial measures—the Abolition of Slavery Act, for example, of that same year—this bill advanced the cause of freedom. He confessed that British despotism in India was an anomaly, and he could only plead that it was already better than most of the despotisms on record and that it could be made better still by grafting onto it ‘those blessings which are the natural fruits of liberty’. But the only really good government, he declared, was representative government, and despotism at its best was only to be tolerated in India because nobody denied, not even so staunch a champion of pure democracy as James Mill, that representative government was ‘wholly out of the question’ in India at that time.<sup>1</sup> The paradox, in fact, could not be resolved until, as a result of a lengthy process of education, that ‘proudest day’ arrived.

Meanwhile, it seemed, there could be little change in the existing system. Macaulay, indeed, was at pains to warn the Commons against hasty innovations. India, he pointed out, was unique. There were no precedents to go by.

The light of political science and of history is withdrawn—we are walking in darkness—we do not distinctly see whither we are going. It is the wisdom of man so situated to feel his way, and not to plant his foot till he is well assured that the ground before him is firm.

The Act of 1833, accordingly, was a cautious measure. The Government of British India was still to be a purely official government. Executive authority was vested as before in a Supreme or Central Government of India, which was also to continue for the time being to act as the Government of Bengal. It was still to consist of the Governor-General and three full Members of Council, but a fourth member was now added for purposes of legislation only. Subject to the Central Government’s ‘superintendence, direction, and control’, executive authority was still vested also in the Governors of Madras and Bombay and their corresponding Councils. Legislative authority, which had previously been exercised by all the Presidencies, was now reserved to the Central Government alone.

Thus the Act of 1833 made no substantial change. But, if British rule in India remained a kind of despotism, it was a different kind from that which it replaced. As has already been

<sup>1</sup> Mill’s evidence before the Select Committee, 1832: Q. 364.



explained, it was not absolutism. Unlike their predecessors, the new despots were subject to the rule of law. Nor was it autocracy. The Government of India was not the Governor-General alone but the Governor-General in Council, a corporate body, in which he sat as *primus inter pares* and in which, though he possessed an overriding power in special circumstances, the decisions were normally majority decisions. Nor again were he and his colleagues responsible, like previous Indian rulers, to no one but themselves. They were responsible to the British authorities in London who in turn were under the control of the British Parliament from which the whole system of government derived its authority and by which it might at any time be changed. In order that there should be no doubt at all on this basic point, a section was inserted in the Act declaring that 'a full, complete and constantly existing right and power is intended to be reserved to Parliament' to control the Indian Government's proceedings both in administration and in legislation.<sup>1</sup> Thus it was the British Parliament in the last resort that held the power once wielded by the Great Moguls, and it lay with the British people through their representatives in Parliament to see to it that the British despotism now exercised in India was at any rate benevolent.

For the student of world-history, however, the most significant point about the British Raj at the time of its creation was not that it was despotic. In the circumstances it could be nothing else. Far more significant is the reaction of British opinion towards it. To the Asiatic invaders of India the idea of giving up what they had got as long as they were strong enough to keep it would have seemed absurd. Nor did the Russian conquerors of northern Asia have any qualms about the permanence of the Tsar's far-flung dominion. But by Englishmen of the early nineteenth century, and by Tories as well as Whigs, the subjection of one people to the rule of another was felt to clash with the liberalism which, rooted in British tradition and revived by the American and French Revolutions, was soon to dominate the political thought of the Western world. In the final record and assessment of the relations between Europe and Asia this fact ought not to be ignored.

## 2. THE FIRST STEPS

In 1861 the first steps were taken on what was destined to be the road to Indian self-government. But the authors of the Indian

<sup>1</sup> § LI.

Councils Act did not regard it in that light. They saw no more distinctly whither they were going than their predecessors in 1833. The Act was not inspired by any long-range theories about the future: it was a characteristic British response to an immediate practical need.

The Mutiny had taken the British Government completely by surprise, and it was the shock of it that brought about what had long been impending, the final abolition of the dual system initiated in 1784,<sup>1</sup> the dissolution of the Company, the transference of all responsibility for Indian government directly to the Crown, and the consequential creation of a new Secretary of State for India. But more than that was needed. The Mutiny had revealed a deplorable lack of contact and understanding between Indian public opinion and the Government; and it seemed foolish to continue, as Sir Bartle Frere put it, 'to legislate for millions of people with few means of knowing except by a rebellion whether the laws suit them or not'.<sup>2</sup> It was decided, therefore, to extend the process of enlarging the Governor-General's Council for legislative purposes. The Act of 1833, as has been seen, had added one extra member to it. Under an Act of 1853 it had grown to a total of twelve. The Act of 1861 empowered the Governor-General to nominate twelve more legislative Members and prescribed that half of them—unlike all the other Members who were required to have been in the administrative or judicial service of the Government—should be 'non-officials'. Most of them, it was understood, would be Indians.

Since this association of Indians with Central legislation was clearly not enough to meet the needs of the case, the policy of centralisation adopted in 1833 was reversed. The Act restored the legislative function to Madras and Bombay, provided for its exercise by Bengal and any new Province that might be created, and enlarged the Provincial Councils in the same way as the Central Council.

These were practical measures with a limited objective, and nobody realised at the time that in admitting Indians to the Councils and restoring powers to the Provinces a dual process of 'Indianisation' and decentralisation had been started which was to lead, stage by stage, to Indian self-government. The Act of 1861 was not inspired by Macaulay's vision of a distant future.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 43-4 above.

<sup>2</sup> *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms* (cited henceforth as *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*), 1918, Cmd. 9109, § 60.

In particular, the nomination of Indians to the Councils was not meant to be a step in the direction of representative government. 'You cannot possibly', said the Secretary of State, Sir Charles Wood, when he introduced the bill in the House of Commons, 'assemble at any one place in India persons who shall be the real representatives of the Native population of that empire.'<sup>1</sup> The new move, indeed, was regarded as more consonant with Indian than with Western tradition. Frere likened the functions of the Councils to those of 'the *darbar* of a native Prince . . . the channel from which the ruler learns how his measures are likely to affect his subjects, and may hear of discontent before it becomes disaffection'.<sup>2</sup> Now the *darbar* system was a means, no doubt, by which the opinions of the people could be in some sort represented to their ruler, but it was certainly not representative government.

Still less, of course, was parliamentary government envisaged, however far ahead, in 1861. On the contrary, what seemed to be the first tender shoots of its growth were promptly nipped off. The enlarged Councils of 1853 had consisted of officials only, but they were British officials and therefore parliamentarians by tradition; and, more or less unconsciously, they had modelled the procedure of the Councils on the British parliamentary pattern. They did not confine themselves to legislation. They asked questions about the executive government: they discussed it, they even criticised it. The Act of 1861 put a stop to that. It expressly forbade the transaction of any business in the new Councils other than the consideration and enactment of legislation. Thus, though British statesmen certainly did not foresee in 1861 how strong was to be the trend towards shaping Indian constitutional development on the British model, they seem to have sensed what was coming and to have blurted out, so to speak, their misgivings about it.

### 3. MONARCHY

If representative government in India was not regarded as a practical question in 1861, it was at least an interesting subject for theoretical speculation, and it was discussed, though very briefly, by the greatest political philosopher of the time. John Stuart Mill's classic treatise on *Representative Government* was published, as it happened, in 1861, and in it he still took for granted—as much for granted as his father or Macaulay—that India was not 'in a sufficiently advanced state to be fitted for representative

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, clxii (1861), 641.

<sup>2</sup> *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, §60.

government'. By implication, therefore, he shared Macaulay's view of the ultimate objective; but he combated Macaulay's assumption that representative institutions in India should be of the Western type. Good government of any sort in India, he declared, must be based on

far wider political conceptions than merely English or European practice can supply and . . . a much more profound study of Indian experience and of the conditions of Indian government than either English politicians or those who supply the English public with opinions have hitherto shown any willingness to undertake.<sup>1</sup>

Mill did not specify what Indian conceptions he had in mind, but he cannot have been thinking of any Indian tradition of large-scale representative government. In Southern India it was an ancient custom for the headman of a village to convoke a committee of elders, known as a *panchayat*,<sup>2</sup> to give an arbitral decision on a dispute between villagers. From this kernel a simple form of village self-government might possibly have been developed, and some British officials of the pre-Mutiny period—Elphinstone in Bombay, Munro in Madras—attempted to preserve old *panchayats* and to establish new ones. But little came of it. Most of the *panchayats* withered away, not only in British India but also, where they had existed, in the Indian States. This was not only due to the centralising tendencies of a more active and efficient Provincial or State administration. The villagers themselves preferred, despite the cost, to take their quarrels to the new courts with their trained judges and lawyers and with all the prestige of Government behind them. That, no doubt was the chief reason why a more persistent effort was not made to retain and multiply the *panchayats*, to develop them into village councils with administrative functions, and so to root the growth of Indian self-government in Indian soil.

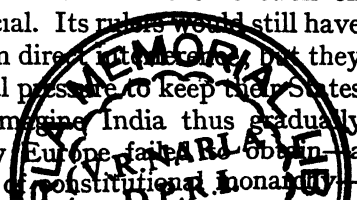
Apart from the *panchayats* there was no guidance to be found in Indian tradition for the development of representative government. If it had ever existed in India on a larger scale, all knowledge of it was lost in the distant past. Mill's prescription, therefore, could only mean—and time was to prove him right—that

<sup>1</sup> *Considerations on Representative Government* (1894 ed.), pp. 319–20, 322, 337. Compare the reference to 'Indian conceptions' in the 'August Offer' of 1940, p. 201 below.

<sup>2</sup> These *panchayats* must be distinguished from the more common form, the caste *panchayat*, consisting of members of one caste only and dealing only with caste questions.

representative institutions could not be reproduced in India on the precise model of those which had grown up in Europe: they must be made to harmonise with Indian experience and the conditions of Indian life. If Mill had pursued his subject further, he might have pointed out that, though the conditions of social life differed in different parts of India, Indian political experience had been everywhere the same. Methods of administration might vary, but everywhere it had been under more or less absolute monarchical control. And he might have gone on to argue that, since monarchy was so deep-rooted in Indian history and sentiment, the natural thing to do—had it been possible—was to retain monarchy and graft representative institutions on to it. In this, if in little else, the political development of India might properly follow the example of those European countries in which representative government had been established not by abolishing monarchy but by limiting its powers.

In the Indian States the method of introducing representative government by the gradual conversion of absolute monarchy into constitutional monarchy was practicable. They had been left, as has been seen, to their Indian rulers. But in the Provinces of British India monarchy had been swept away. No doubt, as will presently be explained, that was virtually inevitable, but it is tempting to imagine what might otherwise have come about. Suppose that all India, instead of only two-fifths of it, had remained politically Indian, that the tradition of monarchy had been retained in the territories which became politically British, and that the British share in the administration had been confined to supervising, guiding, and at need controlling Indian rulers. There would have been no question of alliances or treaties. The British King-Emperor would have exercised the same rights of conquest as his Mogul predecessors. The local monarchs would have been similarly subordinate to him. His Governor-General would have possessed an unrestricted authority to interfere in their domestic policy, and would thus have been able to promote the social and political advancement of the people more firmly and persistently than has been possible in Indian India. And the reaction on Indian India must have been beneficial. Its rulers would still have been protected by their treaties from direct interference, but they would have been under strong moral pressure to keep their States abreast of the others. One can imagine India thus gradually obtaining what nineteenth-century Europe failed to obtain—a more or less homogeneous régime of constitutional monarchy.



and finally achieving national unity in a federation simplified and facilitated by the political similarity of its component units.

It is by no means inconceivable that such a policy might have been adopted in the earlier phases of British expansion if all India had consisted of firmly established kingdoms or principalities. But it did not. It was littered with the shapeless and shifting debris of the Mogul Empire, and to clear it up the easiest and cleanest and often the only practicable course was downright annexation. The subsequent stability of British India was plainly the result of direct British rule; and in 1861 it would have seemed like undoing this work of consolidation if the Provinces, as single units or in parts, were to be handed back to Indian rulers. With the lapse of time, moreover, since the dethronement of the old dynasties, it would often have been difficult to determine who those Indian rulers should be.

Thus, unless indeed Mill was thinking of it, the revival of monarchy in any part of British India seems never to have been contemplated, either then or afterwards, save only in one case.<sup>1</sup> In 1831 the Raja of Mysore was deposed, and for fifty years the State was administered by British officials; but in 1881 the adopted son of the old Raja was permitted to resume the government. Since the terms of the agreement were not dictated, like the earlier treaties, by the political exigencies of the moment, they conceded to the Paramount Power a markedly greater measure of control. One clause laid down that 'the Maharaja of Mysore shall at all times conform to such advice as the Governor-General in Council may offer him with a view to the management of his finances, the settlement and collection of his revenues, the imposition of taxes, the administration of justice' and so on.<sup>2</sup> This was strictly in accordance with the principles of Indirect Rule as it was to be practised later on in different circumstances in other parts of the British Empire, and it is an interesting fact that Mysore to-day is one of the most progressive and prosperous of all the Indian States.

It is idle to dwell on might-have-beens, but it is perhaps worth remarking that the course of constitutional development would have had a somewhat different complexion if the monarchical tradition could have been and had been retained in British India.

<sup>1</sup> Benares might be cited as a second case. In 1911, its Raja, who had hitherto been regarded as a great landholder with administrative powers in his 'domains', was raised to the status of a 'chief'. But the area involved was small, and Benares cannot rank with Mysore.

<sup>2</sup> Clause xxii: Aitcheson, *op. cit.*, ix. 234. Cf. Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 471.

The growth of popular government would have been more of an Indian and less of an Indo-British question. In the first instance at any rate, if not in the last resort, the issue would have lain—as in Indian India now or as in England in the past—between peoples and rulers of the same or a kindred race, and for that reason it might have been less complicated and exacerbated by nationalist sentiment.

#### 4. REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT

It may facilitate an understanding of the position in 1861 and of the long constitutional controversy which was soon to begin if the dominant features of representative government, as it has operated in the West, are briefly reviewed.

1. It is based on the principle that the government is controlled, both in its legislative and in its executive function, by the representatives of the people, and that those representatives are not appointed<sup>1</sup> by any arbitrary authority but by popular election. This presupposes that there is a substantial body of the people who are sufficiently educated to comprehend the issues at stake at an election and to cast their votes accordingly.

2. The decisions made at the elections and in the elected legislatures are majority decisions. It is government by majority rule. Plainly it cannot work unless the people as a whole accept the principle of settling matters by counting heads instead of breaking them. The minority must acquiesce in the majority's decisions. Plainly, again, such acquiescence is obtainable only in a more or less homogeneous society. An autocrat can override discord, but popular majority rule requires that the standards and purposes of all sections of the people are at root sufficiently alike to make it possible for the composition and strength of majorities and minorities to change, for public opinion to swing from one side to the other, and so for a minority, as the result of periodical elections, to become sooner or later a majority.

3. Methods of election vary. First, it can be direct or indirect: the people of a constituency can directly choose their representative or choose an agent to vote in an 'electoral college' on their behalf.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, the choice can be made by the 'simple majority' method, under which each voter records one vote for one candidate and the candidate who secures most votes is elected, or by some more complex system, such as proportional representation,

<sup>1</sup> e.g. the French Senate under the Third Republic.

designed to obtain a more accurate register of opinion. Thirdly, the constituencies are almost always 'general', i.e. comprising all the voters in a certain geographical area irrespective of the differences between them, but in one or two cases they consist of voters belonging to different economic or cultural groups.<sup>1</sup>

4. The relations between the legislature and the executive also vary. Under the system known as parliamentary or cabinet government, first developed in England and afterwards adopted by some other European countries, the members of the government are also members of the legislature and are continuously responsible to it; i.e. they depend for their retention of office from day to day on the support of a majority in the legislature, usually in its lower or more popular chamber. In Switzerland the members of the government are not members of the legislature; they are elected at the outset of a legislature's life and hold office till the end of it whatever changes of opinion may occur from time to time. In the United States of America the members of the government are chosen (subject to the Senate's approval) by the President who is separately elected by the people and, with his colleagues, remains quite separate from the legislature, and, except in so far as his policy can be affected by legislation, is not controlled by it.

5. In the United States, Britain and the British Dominions, the two-party system was usually in operation till recent years, i.e. the Government and the Opposition were each supported by a single party. But, except in the United States, Canada and New Zealand, single-party government has tended, not only in war-time, to be replaced by government by coalitions of two or more parties. In continental Europe a multi-party system has been usual. In pre-war France, Governments were backed by a *bloc* of several groups.

6. Most of the systems of representative government are unitary: i.e. whatever organs of local government may exist, they are all subordinate to one national legislature. But the United States, Switzerland, Canada and Australia have adopted the federal system: i.e. authority is divided between the legislatures of the Provinces or States and the Central or National legislature, each legislature being independent in its own field. This is an extension of the principles of representative government, not a departure from them. The federal units may differ in character—they differ more in Switzerland and Canada than in the United States and Australia—but the difference is not great enough to

<sup>1</sup> University seats in the United Kingdom are an example of the latter.



prevent the acceptance of majority rule at the Centre for Central purposes. Under the Swiss constitution majority rule is modified by the provision that the major Cantons, which have different linguistic and religious majorities, must be represented in the Federal Government which is thus a kind of inter-Cantonal Coalition.

7. All the countries practising representative government possess written constitutions with the solitary exception of Britain. The British constitution consists partly of statute law and partly of conventions, and for its working the latter part is not the less important. Mainly for this reason the British parliamentary system requires for its successful operation a distinctive habit of mind, a readiness to recognise conventions as no less binding than law, a desire to settle political disputes as far as possible by compromise rather than by the sheer weight of a majority. At its best it approximates to the democratic ideal which is not so much government by majority as government by discussion.

8. Already by 1861 the British parliamentary system had proved capable of transplantation to British soil overseas. In obedience to the doctrine of Lord Durham's famous Report, the British Colonies in North America, Australia and New Zealand, which had long possessed representative government in the narrow sense (i.e. popularly elected legislatures controlling legislation but not administration), had acquired responsible government of the British type (i.e. the executive had been rendered responsible to the legislature). In 1867, moreover, the British North American Colonies, on their own initiative and by their own procedure, drafted a federal constitution which, having been accepted and enacted by the British Parliament, created the Dominion of Canada. The scope of Colonial self-government was still limited. Certain overriding powers were still vested in the British Government, and the foreign policy and defence of the Empire as a whole were still controlled by it. But, though it may not have been clear then, it is clear to-day that the subsequent development of the Dominions into completely self-governing nations, associated on an equal footing with Britain and each other, was already inherent in the situation.

It is evident enough from this brief review why, even to minds as liberal as Mill's, representative government in India seemed a long way off in 1861. Its two main prerequisites—a sufficiently educated electorate and a sufficiently homogeneous society—were lacking. The growth of higher education was producing a fast-increasing urban middle-class intelligentsia, but the vast mass of

the people were still completely illiterate. Their only interests in this world were their families and crops and cattle. They knew nothing about politics. The paraphernalia of a popular election would have merely bewildered them. Nor, it seemed, was there any weakening in those divisions of caste and creed which inhibited the growth of a consciousness of common citizenship even in a single town or district, still more in an all-embracing state. Thus, while the idea that Indians would learn in due course to 'govern and protect' themselves was never repudiated, the prospect of the 'proudest day' seemed steadily to recede. The reaction to the Mutiny tended to push it further beyond the horizon. By the 'eighties it had been comfortably tucked away at the back of the British mind, a mind which habitually concerns itself more with the practical needs of the moment than with speculations about the future. The longer, in fact, that the British Raj lasted, the harder it seemed to contemplate its replacement by an Indian Raj. It was harder, say, for Ripon in 1884 than it had been for Lawrence in 1844.

That was not only due to the difficulties and doubts about Indian self-government. There were external factors also. The strategic argument for keeping a firm hold on the defence of India had gained in force with the revival of international rivalries in Europe. The harsh experience of our own day has taught public opinion that, as long as war is retained as an 'instrument of national policy', there is no major political issue which is not involved, directly or indirectly, in the hazardous complex of international relations; and British policy in India was no exception to this rule. From 1861 onwards it was necessarily affected by the advance of the Russian Empire to the frontier of Afghanistan. In the year in which, as will be seen, the first meeting of the Indian National Congress marked the birth of Indian nationalism, the 'Penjdeh incident' on the Indian frontier brought Britain and Russia to the brink of war. And no sooner had the fear of Russian expansion died away than a new potential menace to the security of India was presented by the startling rise of Japan. The idea that Britain should leave the defence of India in Indian hands would have seemed in those days quite fantastic.

The financial and commercial arguments for maintaining the stability of the British Raj were also steadily growing stronger. The total amount of British money invested in the public debt or in private enterprise in India was rising year by year. By 1900 the public debt was over £200 millions, most of it owed to British

stockholders, and British private investments in banking companies, in jute and tea plantations, and in various other forms of business were estimated at over £300 millions. The volume of Indian trade was likewise growing in this period; and if, as has been seen, the British share of imports into India and exports from it was now falling, it was still 33 per cent. and 70 per cent. respectively in 1890. And there was another and less materialist consideration. In the 'eighteen-eighties', it must be remembered, the final establishment of the British Raj was a relatively recent achievement. Only forty years had passed since the Punjab had been taken over from the arbitrary rule of the Sikhs, only thirty years since Oudh had been rescued from anarchy. The outbreaks of lawlessness in the areas in which the Mutiny was temporarily successful had revealed the strength of the criminal underworld and of the old feuds and hatreds which still lurked beneath the frame of British rule; and the maintenance of law and order was still constantly endangered by communal strife. If Hindu-Moslem antagonism was apparently weakening before the Mutiny, it definitely stiffened after it. To the officials on the spot, therefore, it seemed obvious that India would need a strong and neutral government for a long time to come.

In Britain, meanwhile, public interest in India, excited for a time by the dramatic events of the Mutiny, was dying down. Parliamentary debates on Indian questions were few and ill-attended. Only on rare occasions could Indian policy be made an issue in party warfare, for those leaders on both sides who concerned themselves at all with India were agreed that Indian self-government was not yet practical politics. Disraeli, for example, would scarcely have presented Queen Victoria with the imperial title of the Moguls in 1876 in order, as he said, to show the world 'that the Parliament of England has resolved to uphold the Empire of India',<sup>1</sup> if he had not supposed that the British Raj would last as long as the Mogul. John Bright, in every way Disraeli's opposite, was also interested in India—he made friends with Indian nationalists who visited England—but he was as convinced as any Tory that the attainment of India's freedom would be a matter of 'generations'.<sup>2</sup>

So the question of constitutional advance remained in abeyance in British circles. When at last it was raised, it was Indians who raised it.

<sup>1</sup> Buckle, *Life of Disraeli*, vol. v (London, 1920), p. 466.

<sup>2</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Life of Bright* (London, 1925), p. 266.

## II

# The Birth of Indian Nationalism

### I. THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE PROVINCES

WITH the final establishment of the British Raj the old days of fighting and intrigue, of shifting frontiers and changing rulers, had passed away. Thenceforward political boundaries might be modified for administrative or cultural reasons, but not by force of arms. Nor were any more civil wars of succession to be fought. India, in fact, had obtained a more stable framework of government than she had ever possessed before for any length of time. This was an immeasurable boon to the masses of Indian countryfolk, but it did not widen their outlook beyond the bounds of their innumerable villages. Their patriotism, if so it can be called, was still purely local. They were used to foreign rulers, and even the change from Indian to British rule meant little to them except that British rule was better. The ideas of nationalism, of self-government and nationhood, were quite beyond their understanding. But it was otherwise with educated Indians in the towns, a relatively small minority, but now rapidly growing in numbers and importance. On their minds the stability of the British Raj was having its effect. Not long after the Mutiny a new political consciousness, a new sense of civic allegiance, was beginning to make itself felt in accordance with the new framework of government. It was first apparent in the Provinces and then in British India as a whole.

The acquisition by the Provinces of a coherent and individual character was not in every case the doing of the British Raj. The Punjab under the Sikhs and Bengal under its Moslem rulers had been distinct 'countries', comparable with those of Europe. But most of the British Provinces had no such previous tradition. Their frontiers did not correspond with the historical or cultural divisions of the Indian peoples. They had been drawn to suit political or administrative convenience at the time of absorption into British India.

Bombay, for example, obtained only a part of Maharashtra in 1818, and only about one-fifth of its Hindu population are Marathas now. Then as now, large sections of them spoke Gujerati and Canarese, and Sindi too, till Sind was made a separate Province in 1936. And there were Moslem and other communal minorities,

notably the wealthy and enterprising Parsi business-men, centred in the Provincial capital, the western gateway of India, which, as it grew in size and commercial and industrial activity, was to prove, as much as Calcutta in Bengal, the nucleus of Provincial life.

More artificial was the make-up of the Central Provinces,<sup>1</sup> a single Provincial unit, but possessing no real natural frontiers and combining Maratha-speaking people in the south and west with Hindi-speaking people in the north and east together with a number of primitive tribes inhabiting the hilly midland areas.

The other Province with a multiple title,<sup>2</sup> the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh, had a more coherent and uniform character. It stretched over the vast flat plain of the Ganges in which the climate and other physical features, league after league, were much the same. Historically it was the ancient Hindustan, the home of Hinduism, the stage trodden by the heroes of the great Hindu epics, the location of the most sacred Hindu shrines. Its peoples mostly spoke Hindustani—the Hindus in its Hindi, the Moslems in its Urdu form. The United Provinces, indeed, might have become a really united Province if the factors making for unity had not been cut across by communal schism. The Moslem minority, though larger than in any other Hindu-majority Province, has never been large in itself—it is only 16 per cent. to-day—but nowhere has Moslem sentiment been more stubbornly opposed to Hindu domination. And the Moslems in this historic area have matched Hindu memories of a distant past with more recent memories of their own. The holy land of Hinduism is also the land in which the triumphs of Moslem architecture, the mosques and citadels and mausoleums, recall the greatness of the Mogul age.

Largely because it has been less afflicted by Hindu-Moslem antagonism, Madras has been the most coherent, the most united of all the larger Provinces. Its population has always been more predominantly Hindu than that of any other Province: 73 per cent. are Hindus to-day, 85 per cent. if the outcastes are reckoned in; the Moslems number only about 8 per cent. And all the languages of Madras belong to the Dravidian family and differ widely from the other languages of India. It is only in recent years that the unity of Madras has been weakened by the spread of new ideas of cultural autonomy and the growth of separatist movements among the Telegu speakers in the north, the Tamil speakers in the south, and the Canarese speakers in the west.

<sup>1</sup> Berar, leased from Hyderabad in 1902, was attached to the Central Provinces in 1903.

<sup>2</sup> Adopted in 1902.

At a later period the demarcation of the Provinces was to be made substantially more 'natural' by the creation of new Provinces, mainly on a linguistic basis. The Biharis and Oriyas were to be separated from Bengal and Madras like the Sindis from Bombay. But already in the last decades of the nineteenth century the great territorial units had acquired a real character of their own from the mere fact that they were stable units of administration. A strong Provincial Government with its own powers in finance and legislation, a Provincial civil service recruited from the people of the Province, Provincial courts of justice, Provincial schools and colleges, and, in due course, universities—all this was bound to have a unifying effect, to foster among the educated classes a sense of the state, to inspire, even before the growth of self-government gave it new force and meaning, a Provincial patriotism. Time and circumstance and custom, steadily confirming the natural features of the Provincial framework and steadily wearing down its artificial features, were giving to the political organisation of vast and complex India a more definite and more solid shape. Out of the chaos and strife a group of 'countries' had emerged, and to Englishmen like John Bright it seemed that the political map of India might ultimately assume something like the international pattern of the map of Europe. Bright had always favoured the growth of Provincial patriotism. In 1858 he had urged in the House of Commons that British India should be split into five Presidencies or Provinces, wholly separate from each other and under separate control by the British Government. Restating this policy in 1877, he said:

You would teach the people of each of these Presidencies to consider themselves, as generations passed on, as the subjects and people of that State. And thus, if the time should come—and it will come, for I agree with Lord Lawrence that no man who examines the question can doubt that some time it must come—when the power of England, from some cause or other, is withdrawn from India, then each of these States would be able to sustain itself as a compact, as a self-governing community. You would have five or six great States there, as you have five or six great States in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE UNIFICATION OF INDIA

If Bright had studied the past of India or had been able to foresee the future of Europe, he could scarcely have desired that

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *Life of John Bright* (London, 1925), p. 266.

interstate relations in the one should be assimilated to international relations in the other. He must needs have welcomed the outstanding fact which differentiated them—the fact that the Provincial States of British India were United States—and realised that the process of unification which was operating in India as a whole was at least as important for its future welfare as that which was operating in the Provinces.

As in each Province, so in all India, a single Government was now directly or indirectly in supreme control; and in British India this control was highly centralised. Each of those Provincial Governments which was helping to give its Province a sense of unity was itself the instrument of a superior Central Government which controlled its finances and supervised its legislation and administration. The jumble of warring fragments into which the Mogul Empire had dissolved was thus being fitted together again within a more complete and stronger frame. And other and still more powerful factors were now working in the same direction. In the first place it was now possible for educated Indians not only to travel throughout India with a speed and safety hitherto unknown, but also to communicate with one another at any time and at any distance. As the result, moreover, of the adoption of the English language as the vehicle of all higher education, Indians from all parts of India could now at last dispense with the cramping and distorting medium of interpretation or translation and talk or write to one another easily and straight. Newspapers and books, too, in English were now being printed in India, which could and did obtain a circulation far beyond the borders of the Provinces in which they happened to be published. And with these new facilities for contact and communication a multitude of social and economic links were being forged between one part of India and another—friendships, marriages, professional ties, academic associations and a fast-spreading network of finance and trade. Thus the words 'India' and 'Indians' began to acquire a new meaning. Indians now going to Europe in increasing numbers in pursuit of business or education or pleasure discovered that India was regarded by most Europeans as one country and all its inhabitants as one people.

Meantime the growth of higher education was confirming these ideas and, as it happened, running them in one respect into a particular mould. It was education in English and largely in English thought. Its impact on Indian religion and philosophy was relatively slight: for in this field there was an old-established

tradition strong enough to resist new doctrines from abroad. But the field of politics was relatively virgin soil. No other doctrine, Hindu or Moslem, had yet grown out of it than the old doctrine of autocracy by divine right: there was no political science in the modern sense. But in Europe this was the golden age of Liberalism: and in Indian minds, especially those of young Indians, studying the political classics of English literature from Milton to Mill, the two main tenets of Liberalism—nationalism and democracy—were soon firmly planted. They took for gospel, without much consideration of what 'nation' meant, that nations should be free and, without much reflection on the long history of political evolution in Europe, that national governments should be popular governments. They gathered, also, both from their text-books and from the opinions of their British teachers and friends that in both these matters Britain claimed to have taken the lead in the world. They discovered how British Liberalism had backed the cause of nations 'rightly struggling to be free'—in South America, in the Balkans, in Italy, in Ireland. And they found that Britain was not only the most powerful champion of popular government in the West, but had also evolved a particular form of it, which to its British practitioners, at any rate, seemed the best of all possible forms. They learned, finally, that this particular British form of government, parliamentary responsible government, could be transplanted: that, in fact, since the morrow of the American Revolution, it had been gradually extended to the British self-governing Colonies overseas.

Thus, as time went on, a growing number of Indians became not only politically minded, but linked with one another by a common conception of India's political destiny. In the first place, India, they believed, was a nation *in posse*: it had only to realise its nationhood. Secondly, the nation would be entitled to its national freedom as soon as it was fitted to exercise it: and the best method of making it fit was the gradual introduction of British parliamentary government on the Colonial model.

### 3. THE INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

Indian nationalism may be said to have taken formal shape when in 1885 seventy-two Indians from various parts of India attended the first Session of the Indian National Congress. It was a very different body then from what it is now. Its members were nationalists, but of the kind that came to be called Moderates or



Liberals. They were not anti-British. On the contrary, they recognised that Indian nationalism was the child of the British Raj. The first speaker on the first resolution, Mr. Subramania Aiyar of Madras, after declaring that 'by a merciful dispensation of Providence' Britain had rescued India from centuries of external aggression and internal strife, summed up the benefits of British rule 'in one remarkable fact, that for the first time in the history of the Indian populations there is to be beheld the phenomenon of national unity among them, of a sense of national existence'.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Bonerji, who presided at the first Session, spoke as follows at the second, held at Calcutta in 1886:

I ask whether in the most glorious days of Hindu rule you could imagine the possibility of a meeting of this kind. . . . Would it have been possible even in the days of Akbar for a meeting like this to assemble, composed of all classes and communities, all speaking one language? . . . It is under the civilising rule of the Queen and the people of England that we meet here together, hindered by none, freely allowed to speak our minds without the least fear or hesitation. Such a thing is possible under British rule, and under British rule only.<sup>2</sup>

The representatives of the British Raj could scarcely quarrel with such filial piety. One of the most active founders of the movement was a British ex-official, Hume, son of the famous Radical; and for several years it was backed and advised by such British partisans as Yule and, later on, Wedderburn and Cotton. Nor, in its early days at any rate, was the movement frowned on in official circles. The Governor of Bombay (Reay) was known to be so warmly sympathetic that it was suggested that he might preside and, though Lord Dufferin decided that officials should only attend as friendly 'observers', he did not withhold his vice-regal blessing.

The Congress programme was concerned with both the pace and the method of constitutional progress. As to pace it declared that a step beyond that taken in 1861 was now certainly overdue. It was no less certain as to method. 'Indirectly this Conference', said the prospectus issued before it met, 'will form the germ of a Native Parliament, and, if properly conducted, will constitute in a few years an unanswerable reply to the assertion that India is still wholly unfit for any form of representative institutions.'<sup>3</sup> And at

<sup>1</sup> Sir V. Lovett, *History of the Indian Nationalist Movement* (2nd ed., London, 1920), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Sir V. Chirol, *India* (London, 1926), pp. 89-90.

<sup>3</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 35.

the first and second Sessions resolutions were carried asking for specific advances along the parliamentary road. At least half the members of the Legislative Councils should be elected, and they should be entitled to deal with the budget and to ask questions on all matters of administration within the limits of public safety.<sup>1</sup> Later on, as will be seen, the 'Colonial model' was formally adopted.

This programme might almost be described as 'pure Macaulay-ese'. Did it not portend that the dream of 1833 was coming true? Indians, having become instructed in European knowledge, were demanding European institutions. But, if the programme accorded with Macaulay, it did not accord with Mill. It ignored the difference between the 'conditions of government' in India and in Europe. It assumed that old-established political practices and habits of mind could be easily transplanted from British to Indian soil.

#### 4. THE MOSLEM RECOIL

In the course of his farewell speech in 1888, Dufferin, disturbed by the growing self-assurance of Congress demands, thought fit to describe its adherents as a 'microscopic minority' of the multitudinous Indian people. That was true enough at the time, but the congenital weakness of the new nationalism did not lie there. Time and again the fate of a nation has been decided, and often rightly decided, by a vigorous minority. The real weakness lay in the fact that the nationalist movement was not supported by all educated Indians: it was not the expression of a pan-Indian patriotism. As time went on, Congress leaders were to claim, increasingly and insistently, that the Congress spoke for the whole of India. But this has never been true. In the first place the Congress has never represented the Indian States, nor has its representation of the minority communities in British India been ever more than partial. The second of these weaknesses, as the sequel will show, has been much more serious than the first, and, though its implications may not have been fully realised at the outset, the fact that it existed was plain enough. The first Session of the Congress was overwhelmingly Hindu in composition. Of its seventy-two members only two were Moslems, a couple of lawyers from Bombay. At the second Session, held in the more Moslem north, there were 33 Moslem delegates out of 440. For a time the Moslem

<sup>1</sup> D. Chakrabarty and C. Bhattacharyya, *Congress in Evolution* (Calcutta, 1935), pp. 2-3.

proportion grew—it was 156 out of 702 in 1890—but thereafter it declined.<sup>1</sup>

This did not mean that the Moslems in general were less patriotic than the Hindus. It might be said, indeed, that they had more reason to resent the British Raj. The Marathas, it is true, were contesting their hold on India before the British intervened; but, not unnaturally, Moslem minds leapt back across the interval in which the Mogul Empire was collapsing to the period of its prime and regarded the British as usurpers of the Mogul throne. Nor was it merely that its occupant was now an alien and an infidel. All power, with its prestige and perquisites, had passed from Moslem to British hands: the British possessed an even more complete monopoly of the higher official posts, whether in the civil service or in the army, than the Moslems at their zenith. But, if such a situation must have prompted them to desire as keenly as Hindus that India should again be ruled by Indians, the desire was tempered by a consideration which did not apply to the Hindus. The Moslems, though a majority in certain areas in the north, were a minority in India as a whole, and, from the standpoint of the new-fangled democratic philosophy, a backward minority.

It was not only that they had ceased to be the governing class. Since the break-up of the Mogul Empire their community as a whole had been suffering a steady social and economic decline. In the countryside many of the big landlords had lost their estates through bad management or litigation, and many of the peasantry had become enmeshed and dispossessed by moneylenders who, since usury is banned by the Koran, were usually Hindus. In the towns the more conservative and slow-moving Moslems were out-matched by the progressive, better educated, better organised Hindus. Even in the Moslem-majority areas, even in Sind or the Punjab, it was the Hindus who had made the most of the commercial opportunities, big and small, which had opened up so swiftly under the British Raj. Only in the ranks of the Indian army were the Moslems still the predominant community. And, if in other respects they were losing their footing, the reason was plain. Moslem conservatism had turned its back on the new facilities for education. It clung to the old narrow orthodox curriculum. It regarded the new learning of the 'Franks' as a menace to its faith. Thus the Moslems had failed to share in the intellectual renaissance which the acquisition of the English language and the knowledge of Western thought and science it conveyed were

<sup>1</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, pp. 38, 43.

bringing about in Hindu India. Inevitably, therefore, the new political ideas meant less to them. Probably the average Hindu student at this time knew more about liberal doctrines and nationalist movements in Europe than most young Englishmen. Certainly the average Moslem student knew less.

It was the connexion between education and government that forced the Moslems to bestir themselves. When Hindu clerks were promoted to posts in which they could give orders, when even policemen were chosen because they were good at their books, it was clearly time for the Moslems to reconsider their attitude to the new education. That was the doctrine preached by the greatest Indian Moslem of those days, Sir Syed Ahmad. Belonging to a family of good position and repute in Mogul days, he had joined the lower ranks of the civil service in 1837 and had steadily risen till in 1878 he reached the highest post so far attained by an Indian, membership of the Governor-General's Legislative Council. His influence within his own community was naturally unrivalled and his greatest service to it was in the field of education. Defying orthodox hostility, he declared that modern learning was neither forbidden by the Koran nor dangerous to the faith it taught; and his final triumph was won when in 1877 he set beside the many mainly Hindu colleges now pursuing that modern learning all over India a Moslem college, one day to become the Moslem University of Aligarh.

The Moslem recoil from Congress nationalism was mainly Ahmad's doing. He was undeniably a patriot and by no means an unquestioning supporter of the British Raj. He had pointed out that the chief cause of the Mutiny was the lack of contact between Government and the governed and had spoken with bitter candour of the arrogant attitude of many Englishmen in India towards Indians.<sup>1</sup> Nor is it true that his hostility to the Congress was inspired mainly, if at all, by the fact that it presumed to criticise a system of government in which he now held such an exalted place. The mainspring of his policy was communal. He believed that the Congress programme spelt danger for his community, and he did his best to dissuade his fellow-Moslems from helping to bring about its execution.

The crux, of course, was the Congress's adherence to representative government in its British form. Ahmad knew, and told the Moslems, what that meant. In 1883 a bill for establishing local self-government in the Central Provinces was passed by the

<sup>1</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

Governor-General's Council. It was strongly supported by Ahmad on principle—representative government, he said, was 'perhaps the greatest and noblest lesson' which India could learn from England—but he insisted that the principle could not be applied in India as fully as in England: the local bodies could not be wholly elective; some of the seats must be filled, as the bill prescribed, by Government nomination.

For socio-political purposes the whole of the population of England forms but one community. It is obvious that the same cannot be said of India. The system of representation by election means the representation of the views and interests of the majority of the population, and in countries where the population is composed of one race and one creed, it is, no doubt, the best system that can be adopted. But in a country like India, where caste distinctions still flourish, where there is no fusion of the various races, where religious distinctions are still violent, where education in its modern sense has not made an equal or proportionate progress among all the sections of the population . . . the system of election, pure and simple, cannot safely be adopted. The larger community would totally override the interests of the smaller community . . .<sup>1</sup>

Thus, at the very beginning of the process of constitutional development in India, the chief crux of the problem it has presented ever since was clearly stated by an Indian; and the subsequent course of that development might have been smoother and the crux itself lost something of its force if the Hindu politicians had recognised at once the potential strength of Moslem sentiment. But for more than one reason they did not.<sup>2</sup> The Moslems, after all, were a small minority in most of India and economically and politically a weak minority; and it was easy enough to regard them as constituting no valid obstacle to applying the arithmetical logic of democracy. Minority rights should, of course, be safeguarded, but a majority also had its rights. To reject the principle of majority rule was to strike at the root of the whole nationalist movement. To emphasise the difference between Britain and India was tantamount to saying that India did not possess the British capacity for self-government. It could be made an excuse

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Council of the Governor-General of India, 1883. Text in Report, Part I, Appendix ii.*

<sup>2</sup> An analogy might be found in the British handling of the Irish problem in Gladstone's day. As Lord Lothian once remarked to the author, while the Conservatives failed to realise the strength of Catholic Irish nationalism, the Liberals failed to realise the strength of the Protestant recoil from it.

for never setting India free from British rule. For these reasons Hindu politicians were inclined to minimise the minority problem or to argue it away. 'We should very much like to know', wrote the author of an official Congress publication in 1890, 'whether Great Britain herself is not divided into two sections, one of which is bitterly hostile to the other and desirous of opposing it on all occasions.'<sup>1</sup> It is curious that the weakness of that argument was not at once apparent. The Liberal and Conservative parties in Britain were certainly in bitter opposition; but in 1892 Gladstone became Prime Minister instead of Salisbury, and in 1895 Salisbury was back again in office, and so on. Could the Congress writer have overlooked the fact that the pendulum could not swing like that in India: that, as long as political parties were mainly communal, the Moslem minorities would always be minorities and never come into power?

The only effective answer which the Congress could have made to the Moslems' challenge was to convince them that it was in fact, as it professed to be, a non-communal organisation, that the ideal of a free Indian nation transcended communal divisions, and that in the campaign to achieve it all communities marched side by side on an equal footing. On such a hypothesis communal arithmetic lost its meaning. There would doubtless be majorities and minorities in the Congress movement as in all political movements, but they would have nothing to do with religion. Many Hindus, no doubt, sincerely held those views in 1885 as many of them do now, but then as now not all of them. And it so happened that the 'extremist' wing of the Congress, the growth of which will be recorded in the next section of this chapter, was, in the early days at any rate, undisguisedly communal. The first extremists were out-and-out Hindus. They represented the deep-rooted conservatism of Hinduism and its reaction against the West. They were associated with the 'back to the Vedas' school which glorified the Hindu past and preached a return to a purer faith, uncontaminated by contact with Western materialism. It was, mainly, in fact, a religious movement at the outset, and, as such, it was necessarily anti-Moslem. One of its champions, for example, founded a society which sought to inhibit Moslems from killing the sacred cow. And, when the movement developed its political side, there too, it was clear, the Moslems had no place. This was strikingly shown when B. G. Tilak, a Brahmin of Maharashtra, who headed the extremist movement in Western India, started a cult of Sivaji, the famous

<sup>1</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

Maratha rebel against Mogul rule. Moslems to him were *mlecchas* or foreigners.<sup>1</sup> Evidently the political set-up of the free India he dreamed of and fought for would reflect the period when the Marathas were in the ascendant.

There was more, then, than Ahmad's influence to account for the growing disinclination of Moslems to join in the Congress demand for the fullest and quickest practicable development of representative government in India. And the breach was soon steadily widening. At the Congress Session at Benares in 1905 the proportion of Moslem delegates fell to 17 out of 756;<sup>2</sup> and in 1906 the Moslem leaders, aware that a new measure of constitutional advance was under discussion, decided to consolidate their forces in a political organisation of their own and founded the All-India Moslem League.

### 5. EXTREMISTS VERSUS MODERATES

At the same time as the Hindu-Moslem schism was cutting across Indian politics, a rift was opening in the ranks of the Congress itself. It is the natural fate of all nationalist movements to split sooner or later into moderate and extremist sections—the one believing in patience, in 'gradualness', in progress by means of lawful agitation and constitutional reform, the other rejecting such methods as unavailing and unending, repudiating all co-operation with the Government, and seeking to intimidate it into a quick surrender by acts of terrorism. Such divisions are at root temperamental, and Indian extremism was mainly recruited from those among the intelligentsia who felt most deeply the humiliation of foreign rule and reacted most fiercely to the racial arrogance which, as has been seen, was exhibited on occasion by members of the British community in India. British parental pride in Indian nationalism must be tempered, therefore, by the reflection that, if the moderates were the children of the Raj, so, to some extent at least, were the extremists.

They were certainly extreme. All the arguments for caution and delay were brushed aside. The question of defence was virtually ignored. It seems to have been taken for granted that British sea-power would continue to protect the shores of India when it was freed from all connexion with the British Empire. Only those politicians who lived at no great distance from the north-west frontier—and these were mostly Moslems—appreciated what its

<sup>1</sup> Thompson and Garratt, *op. cit.*, p. 545.

<sup>2</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

security involved; and after the annexation of Burma there was no frontier problem on the east. Thus the rise of Japan was watched without misgivings; and, when in 1905 she won her swift and decisive victory over Russia, it was joyfully acclaimed as a manifestation of Asiatic power in the modern world and a proof that the myth of European invincibility was dead. The example of the Japanese, indeed, was commended to Indian patriots. The service of the motherland in India, said a Congress publication in 1905, will become 'as great and overmastering a passion as in Japan'.<sup>1</sup>

The other credit items in the balance sheet of the British Raj were, as recorded in an earlier chapter, being revalued at this time by all Indian nationalists, and mostly written down. But the extremists transferred them bodily to the debit side of the account. British rule, they said, had only unified India in form: in fact it had deepened its divisions. It had not promoted the economic advance of India: it had drained its national wealth away.

The doctrine that British rule was an unqualified and unscrupulous tyranny was first preached in western India by B. G. Tilak and then in Bengal by Bepin Chandra Pal and Arabinda Ghose. 'Direct action' resulted in both fields. In 1896 Tilak used the columns of his notorious *Kesari* (Lion) to foment the unrest provoked by the drastic measures taken by the Government to check the spread of an outbreak of bubonic plague in Bombay. 'Did Sivaji commit a sin in killing Afzal Khan or not?' he wrote. 'With benevolent intentions he murdered Afzal Khan for the good of others.'<sup>2</sup> A week afterwards the Plague Commissioner and another British officer were assassinated. In Bengal terrorism began about ten years later, stimulated by the unpopular partition of the Province in 1905, and associated with the worship of the Hindu goddess, Kali. In 1909 a blow was struck at long range: Sir Curzon Wylie, a retired official, was murdered in London by a young pupil of V. D. Savarkar, himself a pupil of Tilak.<sup>3</sup>

The gravest feature of extremism, as its exponents are well aware, is that it starts a vicious circle. Confronted by a revolu-

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the Proceedings of the Benares Session: Lovett, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>2</sup> Lovett, op. cit., pp. 50-5. Afzal Khan was a Moslem general who was treacherously killed by Sivaji in the course of his rebellion against Aurungzeb.

<sup>3</sup> The murderers of Rand and Wylie were executed. Tilak underwent a year's imprisonment for sedition. Savarkar was sentenced for complicity in murder to transportation for life to the penal settlement in the Andaman Islands: he was released in 1924. For his recent activities, see p. 186 below.



tionary movement, a Government must either give in to it or repress it: and, as Gladstone found in Ireland, the most liberal-minded administration can thus be forced into 'coercion'. There comes a point when the attack on the whole system of law and order cannot be effectively combated by the ordinary legal procedure of a liberal state. Sedition has to be treated as a peculiar crime. The normal guarantees of civil liberty are suspended. To that extent the state becomes a 'police state', and the charges levelled against it by the revolutionaries acquire a measure of truth they had not had before. So their armoury is strengthened, and at the same time their enmity is stiffened. The worst result of repression is the hatred it kindles not only in its victims but throughout the circle of their families and friends, especially perhaps among the womenfolk.

Despite its black side and despite, or because of, its dangers, extremism appeals to youth: for it is a doctrine of impatience, the proverbial vice or virtue of the young. And it has another advantage. It is easy for its champions to assert a monopoly of patriotism, to make half-measures seem humiliating, to denounce moderates as fainthearts or traitors—in the parlance of to-day, as Quislings. For these reasons in the last stages of a nationalist movement, if not earlier, the extremists usually get the upper hand. Once the freedom of a nation is in sight, it is hard for a patriot to be content, for however short a time, with anything less than perfect freedom. He wants his nation to stand at once on an equal footing with other nations, and equality is not a matter of degree.

The Indian nationalist movement was destined, as will be recorded later on, to take this customary path, and it seems probable that the Congress would have swerved to the left much earlier than it did if it had not been led at the opening of the nineteenth century by so practical-minded a statesman as G. K. Gokhale, President of the Congress in 1905. The final trial of strength was at the Surat Session in 1907 when, amid bitter abuse and violent disorder, Gokhale's followers succeeded in holding their own against Tilak's. At the Session of 1908 a new Congress constitution was adopted which reaffirmed the moderate policy in its first clause.

The objects of the Indian National Congress are the attainment by the people of India of a system of government similar to that enjoyed by the self-governing members of the British Empire and a participation by them in the rights and responsibilities of the Empire on equal terms with those members. These objects are to be achieved by

constitutional means by bringing about a steady reform of the existing system of administration and by promoting national unity, fostering public spirit and developing and organising the intellectual, moral, economic, and industrial resources of the country.<sup>1</sup>

Speaking at a gathering of students in 1909, Gokhale contrasted the old political doctrine with the new.

Our old public life was based on frank and loyal acceptance of British rule due to a recognition of the fact that it alone could secure to the country the peace and order which were necessary for slowly evolving a nation out of the heterogeneous elements of which India was composed and for ensuring to it a steady advance in different directions. The new teaching condemns all faith in the British Government as childish and all hope of real progress under it as rash.<sup>2</sup>

Young independent-minded Indians, he admitted, were naturally obsessed by two ideas. 'One is how to get rid of the foreigner, and the other is how soon to get rid of him. All else must appear to them comparatively of minor importance.' But the old doctrine was still the wiser doctrine.

We have to remember that British rule, in spite of its inevitable drawbacks as a foreign rule, has been on the whole a great instrument of progress for our people. Its continuance means the continuance of that peace and order which it alone can maintain in our country and with which our best interests, among them those of our growing nationality, are bound up.<sup>3</sup>

This attitude did not mean, of course, that the moderates were in complete agreement with British policy. Gokhale could be an outspoken critic of Government on occasion, and he pleaded earnestly and repeatedly that the pace of constitutional advance should be quickened. But the moderates' attitude did mean that there was no disagreement on the fundamental issue as to whether the freedom of India was to be won suddenly by force or gradually by law. Hence their discord with the British Government was not basic. The two policies were not so much out of tune as out of time.

<sup>1</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

### III

## The British Response

BETWEEN 1861 and 1919 British statesmen had to deal with two nationalist movements—the Irish and the Indian. On the first they were deeply divided: Home Rule was the dominant issue of party warfare. On the second there was no such split. There were differences of opinion, of course, on questions of administration. Lytton's measure of 1878, for instance, restricting the freedom of the Indian press, was opposed by Gladstone and repealed by Ripon in 1882. Another example was the sharp disagreement between Morley and Minto on the treatment of sedition in 1909. But on the major question of constitutional advance Conservatives and Liberals were more or less at one. It was a period of doubt culminating in an act of faith. Conservatives, maybe, were readier to doubt and Liberals to believe, but there was no real conflict of principle.

#### I. LOCAL GOVERNMENT, 1873–83

The first steps taken after the Indian Councils Act of 1861 were in the field of local government. Measures were initiated by Mayo in 1873 and extended by Ripon in 1883 to reform and liberalise the machinery of rural and urban administration. They were not very successful measures and they had little effect outside their own local sphere, but to the student of the Indian question at large they are highly interesting because they provide the first example of that curious contradiction between theory and practice, between intentions and results, which was to characterise the British treatment of the greater constitutional issues right up to 1917.

Ripon was a disciple of Mill, and in commenting on his reforms he not only insisted on the need of making use of 'indigenous institutions as far as possible', but emphatically denied that he was 'trying to impose our English system on India'. But what was actually done? The only indigenous institution of local self-government was the village *panchayat*, and no attempt was made to introduce *panchayats* where they did not already exist. For the larger units of administration—rural districts and municipalities—there was no Indian model of self-government. Almost

automatically, therefore, despite what Ripon had said, something akin to the English system was adopted. The new bodies were not only based on the representative principle: they were constituted to a large extent by the method of election. Many members of the Municipal Councils and Rural District Boards—in some cases a majority—were directly elected.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. THE INDIAN COUNCILS ACT, 1892

It seems strange that the introduction of election for the purposes of local government excited little public interest, since election was the only serious point of contention in the discussion, initiated a few years later, as to the development of the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils established in 1861. Partly because the experiment of inviting Indians to assist in the work of legislation had proved an unqualified success, partly to meet the demand for constitutional advance voiced by the new-born Congress, Dufferin and his official advisers at the Centre made two proposals. (1) The Councils should again be enlarged so as to admit a higher proportion of non-official members. Some of these should still be nominated, but others—as many as two-fifths in the Provincial Councils—should be elected, some by direct election on a high property franchise, others by indirect election exercised by local government bodies and universities. (2) The restriction of the Provincial Councils' functions to purely legislative business should be withdrawn. It should be legitimate to discuss, but not to vote on, the budget and matters of general administration.

These proposals were accepted by Salisbury's Government except with regard to election. They could not agree, said the Secretary of State (Cross), to 'a fundamental change of this description without much more positive evidence in its favour than was forthcoming'.<sup>2</sup> But Lansdowne, who succeeded Dufferin in 1888, continued to press for it, and Gladstone urged, with persuasive moderation, that 'this great and powerful engine of government' should begin to operate in India on however small a scale. The upshot was characteristic of British politics, first because it was a compromise and secondly because the method of convention was adopted instead of that of positive law. The Act did not mention election: it only empowered the Governor-General

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of the British Empire*, vol. v, chap. xxiii. L. Wolf, *Life of Ripon* (London, 1921), ii. 100. For the Moslem attitude, see p. 93 above.

<sup>2</sup> *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, § 69.

in Council to make regulations for the nomination of the non-official members. But that was enough. As young Curzon, the Under-Secretary of State, intimated to the House of Commons,<sup>1</sup> the Governor-General might make it a rule to invite 'representative bodies in India to elect or select or delegate representatives of themselves and their opinions' to be considered for nomination.<sup>2</sup> Though there was to be no direct election, Gladstone declared himself satisfied. Progress in India, he confessed, could only be slow.

In an Asiatic country like India, with its ancient civilisation, with its institutions so peculiar, with such diversities of races, religions and pursuits, with such an enormous extent of country and such a multitude of human beings as probably, except in the case of China, never were before comprehended under a single government, I can well understand the difficulties that confront us in seeking to carry out our task. . . . All other parts of the British Empire present us to a simple problem in comparison with the problem which India presents.'<sup>3</sup>

In forwarding the Act to India the Secretary of State explained that in the view of Parliament the Governor-General and the Provincial Governors might 'find convenience and advantage in consulting from time to time' both local government bodies and associations based on common professional, commercial, or territorial interests, and in 'entertaining at their discretion an expression of their views and recommendations' for the purpose of nominating members of the Councils.<sup>4</sup> Never, surely, has a revolutionary political change been so gently and unobtrusively enacted. Almost as a matter of course the Governor-General and the Governors habitually accepted the recommendations. Thus by convention or *de facto*, though not by specific regulation or *de jure*, the recommendations were elections: and thus for the first time representative institutions were implanted in the government of British India.

But they were not representative institutions of exactly the British kind. Ever since the knights from the shires and the burgesses from the towns first met at Westminster, the elections to the House of Commons have been made by the general body of voters in territorial constituencies and not, with the sole exception of the university seats, by particular groups or associations. But

<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> A. B. Keith, *Speeches and Documents on Indian Policy, 1750-1921* (World's Classics, Oxford, 1922), ii. 73-4.

<sup>4</sup> *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, § 69.

the new Indian quasi-elections were to be made by just such groups and by them alone. Nor did the representative character of the new Councils mean that they were to be instruments of representative government in the form it had acquired in Britain. In the masterly dispatch which he drafted at the outset of the discussions, Dufferin was careful to explain that the proposed reform of the Councils, while it promoted 'the liberalisation of their general character as political institutions', must not be interpreted as 'an approach . . . to English parliamentary government and an English constitution'. 'Such a conclusion would be very wide of the mark, and it would be wrong to leave either the India Office or the Indian public under so erroneous an impression.' The non-official members of the Councils would be able 'to exercise a very powerful and useful influence' over the conduct of the Executive, but not to control it. There would be no responsible or parliamentary government of the British kind. The Government would continue to be appointed by the Crown on the advice of the Secretary of State, i.e. it would be ultimately responsible to Parliament; and in order to discharge that responsibility it must be in a position to carry out its policy whichever way the voting in the Council might go. Nor would the leaders of a dissentient majority in a Council bear 'the heavy sense of responsibility' borne by a parliamentary Opposition, since they would not be able to take the place of the Government they criticised.<sup>1</sup>

The composition and powers of the new Councils accorded with this doctrine. They were now authorised to discuss the budget and ask questions on administration; but there was no intention of making it possible for a Provincial Government to be seriously obstructed, still less overridden, by a hostile majority in its Council. Apart from the reservation to the Governor of the right of veto, the Councils were to be so composed, within the numerical limits prescribed by the Act, that there would be more officials, obliged at need to vote for the Government, than non-officials, and with one exception that intention was fulfilled as long as the Act was in operation.<sup>2</sup> The position at the Centre was similarly safeguarded. In the event, ten members of the Governor-General's Council were officials, five were directly nominated, and four were quasi-elected.

The Councils, in fact, were still regarded as *durbars* rather than

<sup>1</sup> *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, § 68.

<sup>2</sup> In 1906 the Bombay Council contained ten officials and fourteen non-officials, partly elected, partly nominated. *Ibid.*, § 76.

parliaments in embryo. Nowhere, except in the ranks of the Congress, was there any dissent with Dufferin's views. British statesmen in 1892 were as united and emphatic as their predecessors in 1861 in rejecting the idea of representative government on British lines in India or at any rate in postponing its consideration *sine die*. 'It may be,' said the Prime Minister, '—I do not desire to question it—that it is to be the ultimate destiny of India', but he pointed out that it was 'not an Eastern idea', that it only works well when 'all those who are represented desire much the same thing', and that it puts 'an intolerable strain' on a society divided into hostile sections.<sup>1</sup> Curzon ridiculed the notion of representative government for a people of whom the overwhelming majority consisted of 'voiceless millions' of illiterate peasantry.<sup>2</sup> The Liberals joined in the chorus. 'The notion', said Kimberley, who, like Salisbury, had served as Secretary of State for India, 'of parliamentary representation of so vast a country, almost as large as Europe, containing so large a number of different races, is one of the wildest imaginations that ever entered the minds of men.'<sup>3</sup>

### 3. THE INDIAN COUNCILS ACT OF 1909

In 1909, when the next constitutional advance was made, the Liberals had been four years in office. After a long period of Tory government they had secured an unprecedented majority in the House of Commons, and in the period before the outbreak of the first German War they executed an impressive programme of social reform. It was clear from the outset that they would have to tackle the Indian problem, for this was the time when the growth of extremist nationalism had begun to bear its tragic fruit; and it was significant that Morley, Gladstone's chief lieutenant in the campaign for Home Rule in Ireland, was chosen to be Secretary of State for India. It is one of the most striking facts in the whole of the story recorded in this book that a statesman so intelligent as Morley, so historically minded, so proud of the Liberal tradition, proved in 1909 to be almost as much daunted by the complexity of the Indian problem, almost as much in the dark as to how Home Rule could be attained in India, as Macaulay had been in 1833.

Morley's policy, like Macaulay's, was not doctrinaire. The Act

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, cccxlii (1890), 98–9.

<sup>2</sup> Keith, *op. cit.*, ii. 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, cccxlii (1890), 93.

of 1909 was a practical attempt to control and canalise the now fast-flowing current of Indian nationalism. Morley agreed with the Conservative Governor-General,<sup>1</sup> Lord Minto, on the one hand that extremism should be firmly checked and on the other hand that a new move should be made to satisfy the moderates and ensure their continued co-operation with Government. It was decided, accordingly, (1) to recognise and legalise the principle of election for both the Central and Provincial Councils; (2) to enlarge them all once more,<sup>2</sup> and, while retaining an official majority at the Centre, to concede non-official majorities—i.e. of nominated and elected members together—in the Provinces,<sup>3</sup> and (3) to authorise the Councils to discuss and to pass resolutions on any matter of public interest, including the Government's budget policy.

This was a natural advance on 1892, and it naturally stressed and intensified that point of difference which had already emerged between the operation of the representative principle in Britain and its application to India. It was still regarded as impracticable to create 'general' or territorial constituencies of the British type; and, since many more seats were now to be filled by election, the group system of representation was expanded. By rules made under the Act, besides local government bodies and universities, chambers of commerce, landowners, and minority religious communities of which the most important were the Moslems and the Sikhs, were represented. These communal minorities were also given 'weightage', i.e. they obtained more seats than would have been allotted them on a purely numerical basis. This group-representation in itself, as has been noted, accorded with Indian 'conceptions' and 'conditions' rather than British, but the difference was aggravated by the concession to the Moslems, and to them alone, of 'separate electorates', i.e. the elections to the seats reserved for Moslems were to be made by Moslem voters only.

The request for 'separate electorates' as well as 'weightage' was presented to Minto by a Moslem deputation headed by the

<sup>1</sup> Since 1858 the Governor-General has also been entitled Viceroy. Though the latter is the more familiar appellation, only the former is used throughout this book to avoid the possibility of confusion.

<sup>2</sup> The maximum membership of the Central Legislative Council was to be 60, that of the five major Provinces 50, and that of the three minor Provinces 30.

<sup>3</sup> In the event the elected members had just a clear majority in Bengal; but four of them were representatives of the British resident community who could be expected to support the Government on any crucial question.



Aga Khan. At the time when the representative principle was first introduced in the field of local government, the Moslems, as has been seen, had insisted that 'election pure and simple' would not work in India. The quasi-electoral system of 1892 had not been pure and simple, but it had introduced elections of a sort in the Provinces and at the Centre, and those elections had already betrayed the weakness of the Moslem position. Of the candidates 'recommended' by the various electoral bodies for the Central Council, the Moslems had obtained only about half the number to which their numerical proportion of the population of British India entitled them. For the United Provinces Council not one Moslem had been 'recommended'.<sup>1</sup> And those quasi-elections were now to be recognised as full and direct elections and to be greatly multiplied. Since in all the Provinces, except Bengal and the Punjab where they had slight majorities, the Moslems were in a minority—in some a very small minority—they were naturally concerned to do what they could to safeguard their communal rights. It is true that, if British statesmen meant what they said, those rights were not in danger from Hindu majorities since the Councils would still be only like *durbars*, only advising Government, not controlling it. But the Congress interpreted the concessions of 1909 as a definite step towards full parliamentary government on the British or Colonial model, and in fearing that that might in fact prove to be true the Moslems showed a clearer foresight than British statesmen. But how could they protect themselves if indeed 'majority rule' in the full sense of the word were coming? They could not defy arithmetic: their minorities might be bolstered up by 'weight-age', but they would still be minorities. All they could do was to make sure that their representatives were whole-hearted Moslems, resolved to stand up for their rights. That was the reason, as Moslems have often explained, for their wanting 'separate electorates'. In a 'general' or 'mixed' electorate it would be the moderate-minded compromising Moslem who would secure the non-Moslem votes. There was force in this argument, and it was plainly right to convince the Moslems that their just interests were not to be ignored, to secure their acquiescence in the process of constitutional advance, to keep them from breaking away into the wilderness of opposition. But is it certain that they would have been satisfied with nothing less than 'separate electorates' in 1892? The case against them is self-evident. It has been repeatedly stated by Hindus, but never better or more concisely

<sup>1</sup> *Cambridge History of India*, vi, 566.

than in a sentence of the report on which the next instalment of constitutional advance was to be based. 'Division by creeds and classes', wrote Lord Chelmsford and Mr. Montagu in 1918, 'means the creation of political camps organised against each other, and teaches men to think as partisans and not as citizens.'<sup>1</sup>

When, however, Minto promptly and Morley with greater hesitation conceded the Moslem claim, neither of them was thinking in terms of democracy or nationhood. For them those ultimates still lay far beyond the verge of practical politics; and they were quite as certain as their predecessors that what they were doing in India must not, indeed could not, be concerned with political ideas and practices in Britain. When Curzon, with a brilliant career in India now behind him, attacked the new Councils on the ground that they would inevitably become 'parliamentary bodies in miniature',<sup>2</sup> Morley gave a downright answer. 'If it could be said that this chapter of reforms led directly or necessarily to the establishment of a parliamentary system in India, I for one would have nothing at all to do with it.'<sup>3</sup> He was as dogmatic on this point in private as in public. 'Not one whit more than you', he wrote to Minto, 'do I think it desirable or possible, or even conceivable, to adapt English political institutions to the nations who inhabit India'.<sup>4</sup>

There is nothing to show that Morley ever considered what the alternative was to be or what the next step to be taken from the point reached in 1909. The abolition of official majorities in the Provincial Councils meant that real power had been conceded to Indian political leaders in the field of legislation. Was it not inevitable that that power would be increased before long by the concession of *elected* majorities? And would it not then be used to obtain power also in the field of administration? It could no longer be argued that Indians were not qualified to hold high posts. As a supplement to the Act of 1909, Morley himself appointed an Indian to the Executive Council not only in each Province but at the Centre also. Would not the principles of representative government require that sooner or later those Indian administrators should be, like the Indian legislators, the chosen representatives of the people? And, if this was not to be brought about by the development of the British parliamentary system as Mr. Gokhale

<sup>1</sup> *Montagu-Chelmsford Report*, § 229.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, H. of L., i (1909), 136.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Speeches*, 1907-9 (London, 1909), p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> *Recollections* (London, 1917), ii. 172-3.

and his Congress supporters desired, what other method should be adopted?

If Morley did not concern himself with those questions, it may well have been because he was at least as cautious about the pace of advance as about the path it was to take. Reporting to Minto on his confidential talks with Mr. Gokhale at the India Office, 'He made no secret', he wrote, 'of his ultimate hope and design—India to be on the footing of a self-governing Colony. I equally made no secret of my conviction that for many a day to come—long beyond the short span that may be left to us—this was a mere dream.'<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. THE GOVERNMENT OF INDIA ACT OF 1919

The 'Morley-Minto Reforms', which—so the Congress itself declared—had been welcomed throughout India with 'deep and general satisfaction', soon proved disappointing. The very fact that Indian politicians now possessed so much more power seemed to emphasise and aggravate its limitations. They could debate and carry resolutions against their Governments; and the Governments, anxious to encourage the new Councils, sometimes yielded to their pressure. But not always. The Executive could be influenced, but it could not be controlled.

The extremists made the most of the consequent sense of frustration. The 'unrest', as it was called, continued. There was more terrorism in Bengal. And the moderates for their part, still led by Mr. Gokhale, were soon asking for more than they had got in 1909. The opinion expressed by the Central Government in 1911 that 'a larger measure of self-government' should be gradually conceded to the Provinces was welcomed by the Congress who construed it as meaning that the Provincial Governments should be not only less controlled by the Centre—which was all that the Central Government had intended<sup>2</sup>—but also more controlled by the Provincial Councils. In 1913 it asked for another advance in the constitution of the Councils: there should be a non-official majority at the Centre and elected majorities in all the Provinces. Under the impact of the War of 1914, its claims rose still higher. In 1915 it declared that the time had come for the Provincial Councils to acquire 'an effective control over the acts of the Executive Government'. In 1916 it asked that the British

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., ii. 181.

<sup>2</sup> See Lord Sydenham, *My Working Life* (London, 1927), 230-3.

Government should declare its intention 'to confer self-government on India at an early date' and that in any post-war reconstruction of the imperial system India should be 'lifted from the position of a dependency to that of an equal partner in the Empire with the self-governing Dominions'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in seven short years, and particularly in the war years, Indian nationalism may be said to have come of age. In 1885 the prospect of a self-governing Indian nation had been shrouded in the mists of a distant future. In 1916 it seemed not only clearly visible, but almost within reach. The older nationalists had been hoping for the freedom of their children or their children's children—the younger ones were hoping now to live to be free themselves. But this great change in the outlook of Indian nationalism was not matched by any similar change in the facts of Indian life. The obstacles in the path towards self-government were not appreciably less in 1917 than in 1885. The vast majority of the people were still ignorant and apathetic. The caste-system still defied the principles of fellow-citizenship. Communal schism and the division between British and Indian India still questioned the reality of Indian nationhood. To all appearance all these obstacles were as formidable as ever until, at the very end of the period, one of them—and, as the subsequent course of events was to show, the most formidable—was faced and tackled and, at any rate for the time being, overcome. In 1916 the rising tide of nationalism carried the Hindu and Moslem leaders into the same camp.

Before the war Hindu-Moslem antagonism on the constitutional issue had been steadily increasing, and on two points in particular agreement seemed impossible. First, the Moslem League stubbornly upheld 'separate electorates': the Congress as stubbornly condemned them. Secondly, the Congress interpreted its goal of Colonial self-government as implying the adoption of the British parliamentary system: the League repudiated that objective and produced a counter-formula—'the attainment under the aegis of the British Crown of a system of self-government *suited to India*'. On this both wings of the League, the right led by Mr. (later Sir) Muhammad Shafi and the left led by Mr. M. A. Jinnah, an eminent Bombay lawyer, were in accord. Yet, wide as the gulf seemed to be in 1914, in 1916 it was bridged. At the end of that year the leaders of the Congress and the League, meeting at Lucknow, came to an agreement as to the method of election to the Councils and the distribution of the seats, known thereafter as the

<sup>1</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, pp. 14-18.

'Lucknow Pact', and adopted a joint scheme of constitutional advance which had been discussed and decided on at Congress and League Sessions.

The pact was a surrender to the Moslems. The Hindus at last conceded separate Moslem electorates. They were even to be introduced in the Punjab and the Central Provinces where they had not hitherto existed. Moslem 'weightage' was also to be raised substantially above its present level. In the Central Council the Moslems were to constitute one-third of the elected members. All the Moslems yielded in return was the abandonment of their existing right to vote in general as well as separate electorates.

The joint constitutional scheme, on the other hand, was a concession to the Hindus. Its main features were as follows. (1) The Provinces should obtain the fullest practicable measure of freedom from Central control. (2) Four-fifths of the Central and Provincial Legislative Councils should be elected. (3) Not less than half the members of the Central and Provincial Governments should be elected by the elected members of their respective Councils. (4) These Governments should be bound to act in accordance with resolutions passed by the Councils unless they were vetoed, and a vetoed resolution should be put into effect if passed again after not less than one year. (5) Foreign affairs and defence should be left to the control of the Central Government without interference by the Legislature. (6) India should have the same status as the Dominions in any inter-imperial system, and the relations of the Secretary of State with the Government of India (i.e. the Centre) should be similar to those of the Colonial Secretary with the Governments of the Dominions.

On the cardinal point of the relations between Governments and Legislatures this was not a practicable scheme: for it would clearly be impossible for a Government to remain in office confronted by a hostile Legislature and obliged to accept and carry out a policy of which it disapproved. But it was not regarded by its authors as a break-away from the principles which the Congress had consistently maintained since 1885. The scheme was not parliamentary government, but it was intended to lead on to it. The next step, said Mr. Gokhale, 'a long and weary step', would be the attainment of 'responsible administration'.<sup>1</sup> Nor, of course, was the scheme an abandonment of 'majority rule'. On the contrary it confirmed it inasmuch as it strengthened the powers of the Legislatures. Thus the significance of the proceedings at Lucknow

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches* (2nd ed., Madras, 1915), p. 855.

lies in the fact that the Moslem leaders, in return for the Hindus' acquiescence in separate electorates, had apparently overcome the fears which Sir Syed Ahmad had planted so firmly in the minds of the preceding generation, and were willing now to accept the political philosophy and the constitutional objective of the Congress. Viewed in that light, the concordat was a triumph for Indian nationalism. Mr. Jinnah, who was President of the League at the time, acclaimed it as heralding the birth of 'a new India, fast growing to unity of thought, purpose and outlook, responsible to new appeals of territorial patriotism and nationality'.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile public opinion in Britain was changing almost as fast as in India. Before the war it was generally supposed that a considerable time would elapse before an advance would be justified beyond the stage reached in 1909; and in 1912 the Liberal Secretary of State, Lord Crewe, frankly disavowed the idea of Dominion Status as the goal in India.<sup>2</sup> Yet in 1917 the British Government committed itself to a policy which not only involved another advance but logically led to Dominion Status. 'This rapid change, this 'new angle of vision' as it was called, was not mainly due to the growing strength of Indian nationalism. Like that growth itself, it was mainly due to the reactions of the war. From the outset India made a great contribution to the common war effort. She sent one million men to the battlefields. Large sums were voted by the Central Legislature to meet war expenditure, and the Princes and other wealthy Indians made generous gifts to the Government and to patriotic funds. After the United States, moreover, had come into the war and Tsarist Russia had dropped out of it, the Allies adopted the watchwords of 'national self-determination' and 'making the world safe for democracy', and these principles, though intended in the first instance to apply to Europe, might be taken to apply to Asia too. But the 'new vision' was not inspired only by a sense of obligation. The old tradition of Britain's championship of freedom had been revived and stimulated by the conflict with Prussian militarism; and, if the chief author of the new policy was a Liberal statesman, Mr. Montagu, Lord Crewe's successor at the India Office, it was not a party question. The historic Announcement of 1917 was made by Mr. Lloyd George's National Government which included such experienced and sober-minded Conservatives as Lord Milner, Lord Curzon and Mr. Balfour.

The essence of the Announcement lay in its opening sentence.

<sup>1</sup> Lovett, *op. cit.*, p. 121.      <sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, H. of L., xii (1912), 156.

The policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India<sup>1</sup> are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The first clause of this declaration of policy contained nothing new: it accorded with the promise implicit in the 'noble clause' of 1833, hitherto so meagrely fulfilled. But the second clause was startling in its novelty. At every previous step on the path of constitutional advance British statesmen had insisted with one voice that, wherever it led, the path could not lead to British parliamentary government—unless, indeed, at some faraway time the whole character of Indian society should have been so transformed as to make the operation of that particular kind of government possible. But now it was precisely that kind of government that was envisaged: for the term, 'responsible government', had long figured in British history and political thought as meaning that the executive was responsible to the legislature and only through it to the electorate, i.e. the British parliamentary system. Nor could it be supposed that the authors of the Announcement were looking centuries ahead. Clearly 'progressive realisation' was regarded as a process which, however gradual, might be completed within a reasonable time. The *bouleversement* was no less remarkable with regard to Dominion Status, the bare idea of which had so recently been flouted. For the Announcement implied that some day responsible government in India was to be completely realised without breaking its association with the British Empire—a concise description of the rise of the self-governing Colonies to Dominion Status. And herein lay yet another implication, namely, that India, potentially at least, was a nation: that she could acquire a real nationhood which could be embodied, as in the Dominions, in a national system of government.

Soon after the publication of the announcement Mr. Montagu went to India to discuss its application on the spot, and a *Report on Indian Constitutional Reforms*, for which he and Lord Chelmsford, the Governor-General, were jointly responsible, was published in 1918. Its main recommendations were as follows:

1. In order to facilitate the introduction of responsible government

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the Governor-General and the other members of the Central Executive Council.

<sup>2</sup> *Hansard*, xcvi (1917), 1695.

in the Provinces, the devolution of powers from the Centre should be extended and legalised.

2. The Provincial Legislative Councils should be enlarged. In all of them the majority of the members should be elected. The franchise should be widened so as to bring a substantial body of countryfolk into the political field.

3. A beginning of responsible government should be made in the Provinces. Since no one suggested that the Provincial Governments could be made forthwith responsible as a whole to the Legislatures, the field of government should be divided. Some 'subjects', finance and law and order in particular, should be 'reserved' to the control of the Governor-in-Council, i.e. the old official executive, responsible through the Centre to the Secretary of State and Parliament. Other 'subjects', such as education, agriculture, public health, local government, should be 'transferred' to the control of Ministers responsible to the Legislature, the Governor retaining the right to override the Legislature if he deemed it necessary. Responsible government would be 'progressively realised' by the transfer of further 'subjects' to Ministers as and when it should seem justified in the light of experience.

4. The Central Government should remain for the present responsible only to the Secretary of State and Parliament, but the Legislature should be reconstituted on a bicameral basis. The lower house, to be known as 'the Legislative Assembly of India' and intended to 'represent the interests of the entire country', should consist of at least 100 members, two-thirds of whom should be elected as far as possible directly. For purposes which he might deem necessary the Governor-General, like the Provincial Governors, would be empowered to 'certify' measures and carry them into law over the head of the Legislature.

5. These proposals would only refer to British India since Parliament had no authority to legislate for the Indian States.<sup>1</sup> Constitutional advance in the adjacent Provinces would be bound to affect opinion in the States—'hopes and aspirations may overleap frontier lines like sparks across a street'—but the treaties must be honoured and the Princes left to adjust their governments to modern ideas at their own pace and in their own way. Some day—and the authors of the *Report* evidently regarded it as a distant day—union of some kind between British and Indian India might

<sup>1</sup> When the Announcement of 1917 was reaffirmed as the preamble to the Act of 1919, the phrase 'responsible government in India' was rightly corrected by the insertion of 'British'.



be practicable. All India might ultimately constitute 'a sisterhood of States', maintaining full domestic autonomy, but 'presenting the external semblance of some form of federation'. Meantime, as a means of breaking down the unnatural isolation of the States from one another and from British India, a Chamber of Princes should be established at the Centre for purely deliberative purposes.

The Government of India Act of 1919, in which the substance of these recommendations was embodied, was far the most important measure of Indian policy adopted by the British Parliament since the process of constitutional development began in 1861. For it crossed the line between legislative and executive authority. Previous measures had enabled Indians increasingly to control their Legislatures but not their Governments. Some Indians, it is true, had been members of those Governments, but they had been officially appointed and responsible, like their British colleagues, to the Secretary of State and Parliament. Now Indians were to govern, so to speak, on their own. They were to take charge of great departments of Provincial administration, not as official nominees but as the leaders of the elected majorities in their Legislatures and responsible only to them. Limited and checked though it might be, this was a genuine transfer of power; and it was the appointment of these Ministers, more than anything else, that brought home the fact that the abdication of the British Raj had actually begun.

Even more striking than the transfer of executive power was the constitutional method by which it was to be exercised, namely, responsible government as understood and practised in Britain. The 'transferred' field was to be governed under the British parliamentary system. The reason for that was concisely stated at the outset of the *Report*. 'Englishmen believe in responsible government as the best form of government they know; and now in response to requests from India they have promised to extend it to India.'<sup>1</sup> At first sight there might appear to be nothing revolutionary in those quiet sentences. They seem to echo the language of Macaulay as they announce the fulfilment of his dream. But in fact they go further than Macaulay. They speak of British institutions—for 'responsible government', as has been explained, meant the British parliamentary system—whereas Macaulay had spoken of European institutions. And this was a quite startling change of policy. It was true that the ultimate objective of the Congress had always been the British parliamentary system. It

<sup>1</sup> § 7.

was true, too, that a British refusal to agree to that objective might be regarded as a reflection on the political capacity of Indians or even as an excuse for withholding self-government altogether. But those were not new facts. They were plain enough when Dufferin and Ripon, Kimberley and Salisbury, Curzon and Morley affirmed without fear of contradiction that the obstacles to the introduction of the British parliamentary system were insurmountable within measurable time. How then were British statesmen persuaded to the contrary in 1917-19?

It was not because the authors of the new policy minimised those obstacles. On the contrary, they described them frankly and faced them squarely. They admitted that the politically-minded intelligentsia, the only Indians who asked for constitutional advance, might number no more than some 5 per cent. of the population, and that the vast majority, the millions of illiterate countryfolk, knew nothing and cared nothing about politics. 'The immense masses of the people are poor, ignorant, and helpless far beyond the standards of Europe.'<sup>1</sup> They admitted, also, that the Hindu caste-system was a negation of democratic principles, and, linking it with communal division, they said outright that, as long as such sectional interests were paramount, 'any form of self-government to which India can attain must be limited and unreal at best'.<sup>2</sup> As to communal division, especially the Hindu-Moslem schism, it was, they admitted again, 'the difficulty that outweighed all others', and they hesitated to accept the Lucknow concordat as proof 'that religious dissensions between the great communities are over'. 'As long as the two communities entertain anything like their present view as to the separateness of their interests, we are bound to regard religious hostilities as still a very serious possibility.'<sup>3</sup> And the extent to which those interests were in fact regarded as separate was acknowledged when the authors of the *Report*—with even greater reluctance than Morley, since they were contemplating parliamentary government and he was not—acquiesced in the retention of separate electorates. 'The British Government is often accused of dividing men in order to govern them. . . . If it unnecessarily divides them at the very moment when it professes to start them on the road to governing themselves, it will find it difficult to meet the charge of being hypocritical or shortsighted.' But the maintenance of the electoral division was a necessity. It was not merely that the Moslems regarded it as their 'only adequate safeguard', that its abandon-

<sup>1</sup> *Montague-Chelmsford Report*, § 144.    <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 151.    <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, § 154.

ment would rouse 'a storm of bitter protest', and that the Hindus themselves had yielded the point at Lucknow. It was a matter of honesty. Successive Secretaries of State and Governors-General had assured the Moslems that the concession of 1909 held good, and that was 'a pledge which we must honour until we are released from it'.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the old obstacles to parliamentary government were neither ignored nor underrated. Why, then, were they regarded as no longer barring the road? The answer is plain. The new policy was an act of faith. Slowly but surely, it was argued in the first place, the ignorant multitudes would learn how to use the strange power of the vote.

The rural voter will perhaps find himself cajoled or bought or coerced into voting in a way that does himself no good. But eventually it will dawn upon him, as it has done in the agricultural classes elsewhere, that because he has a vote he has the means of protecting himself and that if those who claim to represent him neglect his interests he can discard them.<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, as to caste and communal divisions, the *Report* directly appealed to the sense of Indian patriotism. 'The surest way, perhaps the only way, of ending dissension' was to recognise that through unity alone could the goal of a free Indian nationhood be reached.

The vision is one which may well lift men up to resolve on things that seemed impossible before. Is it too much to hope that the desire of the people of India so to govern themselves and the conviction that they can never do so otherwise in any real sense may prove eventually to be the solvent of these difficulties of race and creed?<sup>3</sup>

There was one last article of faith, expressed in a passage of the *Report* which admirably described the character of that part of the imperial system which was about to reach the climax of its development in the British Commonwealth of Nations.

Further we have every reason to hope that as the result of this process, India's connexion with the Empire will be confirmed by the wishes of her people. The experience of a century of experiments within

<sup>1</sup> §§ 227-31. The *Report* pointed out the logical difficulty of refusing to the other communities who clamoured for it the privilege conceded to the Moslems but they recommended that it should be granted only to the Sikhs. (§ 232.) Under the Act, however, separate electorates were also accorded to Europeans in all but three Provinces, to Anglo-Indians (i.e. descendants of mixed marriages) in two, and to Indian Christians in one.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, § 146.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, § 151.

the Empire goes all in one direction. As power is given to the people of a province or of a Dominion to manage their own local affairs, their attachment becomes the stronger to the Empire which comprehends them all in a common bond of union. The existence of national feeling or the love and pride in a national culture need not conflict with, and may indeed strengthen, the sense of membership in a wider commonwealth. The obstacles to a growth in India of this sense of partnership in the Empire are obvious enough. Differences of race, religion, past history, and civilisation have to be overcome. But the Empire which includes the French of Canada and the Dutch of South Africa—to go no further—cannot in any case be based on ties of race alone. It must depend on a common realisation of the ends for which the Empire exists, the maintenance of peace and order over wide spaces of territory, the maintenance of freedom and the development of the culture of each national entity of which the Empire is composed. These are aims which appeal to the imagination of India, and in proportion as self-government develops patriotism in India we may hope to see the growth of a conscious feeling of organic unity with the Empire as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

*Montague-Chelmsford Report, § 180.*

## IV

# The New Policy on Trial

### I. THE REVOLT OF THE CONGRESS

IT was intended that the development of the new policy should be governed in British fashion not by a pre-arranged time table but by results. The Announcement of 1917 had declared that 'the time and measure of each advance' in 'the progressive realisation of responsible government' would be determined by the use which Indian politicians made of their new opportunities; and the Act of 1919 provided for the appointment of a Commission at the end of ten years to inquire how the initial measure of responsible government had worked in practice and to advise Parliament as to whether its scope should be extended or restricted. Thus progress was made to depend on the co-operation of the main forces of Indian nationalism, and conceivably this co-operation might have been forthcoming if the Congress had retained its pre-war leadership and outlook. But what might have been possible in 1913 proved impossible in 1920. War intensifies nationalism. One result of this war was the creation of several new national States in Europe: another was the British Dominions' assumption of an equal national status with that of Britain; another was the kindling of a new spirit of national independence in Asia—in the Arab countries, in Persia and Afghanistan, in China. The temper of Indian nationalism was bound to be affected by these events. It was harder now for Indian patriots to acquiesce in a gradual process, designed to give India an equal status with other nations at some distant date: harder, too, to accept the claim of a foreign Parliament to decide whether and where and to what extent Indians had shown themselves fit for self-government.

The nationalist leadership had also changed. Gokhale died in 1915, Tilak in 1920. By then Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had become the dominant personality in Indian politics. Born in the *banya* or traders' caste but trained as a lawyer in London, he had made his name in South Africa before the war as the leader of a 'passive resistance' movement against what Lord Hardinge as Governor-General had described as 'invidious and unjust laws' affecting Indians domiciled in the Union. Having succeeded in achieving a tolerable compromise with General Smuts, Gandhi returned to India fortified in his belief that the ancient Hindu

doctrine of *Ahimsa*, the repudiation of force, was not only a matter of ethics or religion but also a political weapon which could be effectively employed against a civilised Government.<sup>1</sup> For some time he kept it sheathed. Not yet a complete pacifist, he did not denounce the war. On the contrary he upheld the cause of Britain and her allies against German militarism; he volunteered for ambulance work in France; and as late as the spring of 1918 he spoke at a meeting at Delhi called by Lord Chelmsford to stimulate a final effort on India's part to help in achieving victory. But soon after that his attitude altered. A committee, headed by Mr. Justice Rowlatt, had been appointed to inquire into the 'terrorism' which was still lurking in certain areas, particularly Bengal. The publication of its report in July 1918 revealed the existence of a secret subversive agitation, marked by bomb-outrages, murders and gang-robberies, which had not been suppressed by means of the ordinary law; and on the Committee's recommendation an Act was passed in March 1919, equipping the Government with special powers for use in an emergency. Gandhi denounced this Act as proof that the British tradition of justice had been overmastered by the love of arbitrary power. He launched a campaign of passive resistance against the Act, not only in the towns but in the country districts; and it was soon apparent that in this small, frail, ascetic, subtle-minded evangelist Indian nationalism had obtained a most formidable champion. For, while Gandhi's revival of old Hindu doctrine appealed to Hindu intellectuals, his bearing and behaviour stirred one of the deepest chords in the Indian peasant's heart—reverence for a saint. But it was also evident that, while Gandhi could easily rouse an ignorant and excitable Indian mob to defy the law, he could not so easily impose on it the doctrine of *ahimsa*; and the turbulence and anti-British feeling he aroused was one of the causes of the outbreak in the Punjab which culminated in the tragedy at Amritsar. He confessed, indeed, that his conduct at this time had been a 'Himalayan miscalculation',<sup>2</sup> but he was not deterred from launching in 1920 his first campaign of 'non-violent non-co-operation' or 'passive resistance' (*satyagraha*), designed to achieve *Swaraj* (self-rule) within a year by the withdrawal of Indian patriots from all association

<sup>1</sup> In a statement to the press on the outbreak of war with Germany in 1939, a Congress leader in Madras observed: 'If Hitler had been here, he would have shot Mahatma Gandhi and all of us by this time.' Mr. S. Satya-murti, *Madras Mail*, 25 September 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Mahatma Gandhi, His Own Story* (ed. C. F. Andrews, London, 1930), p. 310.

with the political, economic and social institutions of British India. He secured the backing of the Congress for this campaign at a special Session, and at the regular Session in mid-winter he carried an amendment to the first clause of the Congress Constitution. 'The object of the Indian National Congress', it now read, 'is the attainment of *Swaraj* by the people of India by all legitimate and peaceful means', not, as heretofore, by 'constitutional means'.<sup>1</sup> Throughout 1921 the non-co-operation movement continued, but it failed to realize its promoters' expectations and in 1922 it began to peter out. It had revealed again the risks of popular agitation in India. Many acts of violence were committed by ignorant and infuriated mobs. The worst of these, the barbarous murder of a body of police at Chauri Chaura early in 1922, prompted Gandhi to suspend, against the wish of his more impetuous disciples, his decision to reinforce passive non-co-operation with mass 'civil disobedience' or positive breaking of the law. Shortly afterwards he was arrested, tried, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. In the course of the trial he admitted his share of responsibility for such occurrences as that at Chauri Chaura. 'I knew that I was playing with fire. I ran the risk, and, if I were set free, I would still do the same.'<sup>2</sup> Early in 1924 he was released on grounds of health, and for the next few years he took a less active part in politics.

He had already changed the course of Indian history. He had done what Tilak had failed to do. He had converted the nationalist movement into a revolutionary movement. He had won over the Congress to the repudiation of the British Government's authority and the defiance of its laws. He had taught it to pursue the goal of India's freedom in its own way and at its own pace, not by 'constitutional' pressure on the Government, still less by discussion and agreement, but by force, none the less force because it was meant to be 'non-violent'. And he had not only made the nationalist movement revolutionary, he had also made it popular. It had hitherto been confined to the urban intelligentsia; it had made no appeal to the countryfolk; and, though the millions of illiterate villagers could not be diverted for any length of time from their primary task of wringing a bare livelihood from the soil, Gandhi's personality had deeply stirred the countryside. Given a free hand, he could rouse the people to follow him along any road; for he had quickly acquired—and it was steadily to grow as time went on—the authority of a *mahatma*, whose words,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 97–8 above.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1922, i. 332–3.

so the Hindu peasantry believed, were inspired and whose powers were more than human.

Naturally, therefore, his standing in the Congress was unique. For some years after 1923 he rarely intervened in political controversy and, when he did, he did not always get his way. At one time, indeed, it seemed as if Mr. C. R. Das, the nationalist leader in Bengal, who declared himself satisfied with the goal of Dominion Status as it was now understood and ready to work for it by constitutional methods, might swing the Congress back to a 'responsive' policy. But Das died in 1925, and, when Gandhi began again in 1928 to play a full part in politics, he at once took the lead. Never since then has his control of Congress policy been disputed effectively or for long.

The change from Gokhale's nationalism to Gandhi's may have quickened for a time the pace of the advance towards *Swaraj*, but there was an element in it which has tended in recent years to have the opposite effect. Gandhi had declared a non-violent war on the British Government, and a non-violent war must needs be largely a war of words. Hence anti-British language was soon habitually used by the leaders of the Congress which would have startled its founders if they had lived to hear it. Young patriots now learned that India was enjoying a golden age of peace and prosperity before the British came and would recapture it as soon as the British were turned out. From first to last the record of the British Raj was blackened. British misconduct in India—and some of it was of very recent memory—was represented not as something which the bulk of British opinion reprobated and repudiated, but as a normal and characteristic attribute of British rule. And that rule, it was asserted, was meant to last for ever. The tributes once paid to Mr. Montagu's understanding of Indian nationalism were forgotten, and the policy of 1917-19 was denounced as an attempt to smother Indian discontent with pledges that were not meant to be kept. The British plea that India was not yet a nation, capable of full national self-government, was branded as hypocrisy. The difficulties alleged to obstruct the path to *Swaraj*, communal schism in particular, had been created, it was said, by British policy: they had now been artificially inflated to serve as an excuse for perpetuating the British Raj; they would solve themselves when it had gone. All Congressmen, of course, did not think and talk in these terms; but enough of them did, including Mr. Gandhi on occasion, to foster in the younger generation a tendency to minimise or evade the real problems of Indian



politics and so to make a reasonable and practical treatment of them harder. More and more the new nationalism became infused with that atmosphere of unreality which seems to the outside observer so strange a feature of the situation in recent years.

## 2. THE ACT OF 1919 IN OPERATION

If the Congress leaders had been willing to work the Act of 1919, if they had served as Provincial Ministers and organised party majorities in the Legislatures, they would have discovered that the problems of Indian politics were not all of British fabrication. As it was, their 'non-co-operation' made it difficult to operate the Act at all. They boycotted the first elections in 1920. When, after a hot dispute, the majority decided to contest the second elections in 1924, it was not with the purpose of working the constitution but of trying to wreck it from within. That they failed, that, except for a time in two Provinces, dyarchy did work, was mainly due to those of Gokhale's Hindu disciples who, refusing to follow Gandhi along the extremist path, fell out of the Congress ranks and became known as Moderates or Liberals. They were by no means docile tools of British policy. They declared themselves dissatisfied with the scope of responsible government conceded by the Act and demanded its rapid extension. But they did not question the sincerity of the Announcement of 1917, and they believed that the best way to get more freedom was to make the most of what they had got.

With their help and that of most of the minority leaders the Legislatures were duly elected and the Ministries duly filled. Thus dyarchy was given a trial, and in some respects it stood the test. Several of the Ministers, loyally backed by the civil services, proved capable administrators, and they promoted and carried a number of useful legislative measures in the 'transferred' field. Their relations with their colleagues on the 'reserved' side were generally harmonious. Thus, clumsy as it was, the machine of dual government proved workable.

Yet the new constitution failed to fulfil its authors' primary purposes. It did not provide a training in parliamentary responsible government, and it did not bring about a subordination of communal allegiance and antagonism to the common public interest.

Responsible government of the British type rests on an effective party system. Ministers must be backed by a party or combination

of parties possessing a majority in the Legislature. The Act worked best in Madras where the non-Brahmin Hindus united in the Justice Party to challenge the traditional supremacy of the Brahmins. In the other Provinces there were a multitude of groups, mostly communal and mostly based on local or personal rivalries, but no well-organised, well-disciplined parties. Loosely knit and ill-financed, the Liberals had neither the strength nor the coherence to provide their ministerial leaders with the backing they required. The Moslem League in those days was a relatively small body, mainly representing the wealthier land-owning class and lacking contact with the Moslem masses. The only party comparable with those of the democratic West, strong enough in numbers and in finance to build up a large-scale political organisation and gradually to extend it all over British India—the only party, moreover, which was all-Indian in the sense that it contained members of all communities in its ranks—was the non-co-operating Congress. Hence Ministers were not steadily supported by steady party majorities, and were thus impelled more and more to rely on the votes of the official representatives or the ‘reserved’ side of the administration. So the main object of the dual system was frustrated. The Government came to be regarded as one Government, Ministers as ‘Government men’ rather than responsible popular leaders, and the majority in the Legislature, more or less as in the days before 1919, as a permanent Opposition.

More sinister and more discouraging to the ‘faith’ of 1919 was the growth of communal strife. Its most alarming feature had always been the intermittent outbreaks of rioting and bloodshed usually associated with the celebration of Hindu or Moslem religious ceremonies but often arising from some quite trivial accident; and the grave disorders provoked in 1917 in part of Bihar by a Hindu attempt to terrorise the Moslem peasantry into ceasing to kill cows seemed to show that the Lucknow Pact did not extend to the rank and file of the two communities. Between the political leaders, however, the *entente* continued, and it was greatly strengthened when in 1920 Gandhi associated the Congress with the Moslem ‘Khilafat movement’, seizing, as he put it, such an opportunity of uniting Hindus and Moslems as ‘will not occur for another hundred years’.<sup>1</sup> But in 1921 the Khilafat movement collapsed. It had been aimed against the British Government’s post-war policy towards the defeated Turkish Empire, and the ground was cut

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches and Writings of M. F. Gandhi* (ed. G. A. Natesan, Madras, 1922), p. 527.

from under it by the rise of Ataturk, the Treaty of Lausanne, and the establishment of a strong and secular Turkish Republic. Meantime the communal gulf had been opened wide again by the ferocious attack of the Moplahs, a fanatical Moslem peasant-folk in south-western India who believed that Gandhi's self-rule meant Hindu rule, on their Hindu neighbours. Even after that, the political leaders still maintained a substantial measure of agreement. Mr. Jinnah and the left wing of the League joined with Congress spokesmen in attacking the British Government and demanding a fuller concession of parliamentary government, still seemingly as little troubled by the prospect of majority rule as they had been when they made the Lucknow Pact. But again the *entente* was not reflected in the attitude of the masses. The tale of riots steadily rose from eleven in 1923 to over thirty in 1926 and 1927. The worst outbreak was in Calcutta in 1926: it lasted for more than a fortnight: 67 people were killed and over 400 injured. Lord Irwin (now Lord Halifax), who became Governor-General that year, made an earnest and outspoken appeal for the salvation of India's national life from the canker that was eating into it. It was echoed by Indian leaders, but the tension was not relieved. And the reason seemed evident. The new constitution had given executive power, limited but real within its limits, to Indian politicians chosen by Indian electorates. This was meant to be, and despite nationalist denials of British good faith, it was dimly understood to be, the first step, as has been said above, in a process of abdication. Accordingly, behind the façade of a united nationalist campaign against the British Raj, a struggle had already begun for the heritage of place and power it would some day leave behind it.

This widening of the Hindu-Moslem breach in the country at large was the more disappointing because the working of the new constitution at the Centre seemed to encourage the belief that the sense of an Indian nationhood transcending communal divisions was growing stronger. The new Central Legislature seemed to be fulfilling all its creators' hopes. Since dyarchy was confined to the Provinces, and the Central Executive Council, now consisting of five British Members (including the Governor-General) and three Indian, was still responsible only to the Secretary of State, the majority of the Assembly constituted a permanent Opposition; but, even when the elections of 1924 brought in a number of Congressmen, it did not adopt a purely destructive or wrecking attitude. On the contrary it took a vigorous part in discussing and

carrying many valuable bills, and between 1921 and 1935 the Governors-General felt themselves obliged only six times to override the Assembly by 'certifying' measures which it had rejected. The debates, though sometimes heated, were orderly. Business was smoothly conducted in accordance with British parliamentary technique. The proceedings were well reported in the press and attracted more public attention than those of the Provincial Legislatures. More important than anything else, it seemed as if within the Assembly walls, whatever might happen outside them, the forces making for nationhood were cutting across the communal schism. Mr. Jinnah and the more radical Moslems were often in the same lobby as the Hindu nationalists.

The Chamber of Princes, similarly, worked as it was meant to work. The regular gathering of all the leading rulers of Indian India or their representatives and their discussion of matters of common interest were evidently helping to break down the artificial isolation hitherto imposed on the States. The idea, moreover, that the two bodies might some day somehow be combined in one great national Parliament for the whole of India was gathering weight. It became more and more possible to imagine that a federal union of some sort might ultimately be brought about.

### 3. ANTICIPATIONS OF NATIONHOOD

There was one aspect of British policy between 1919 and 1935 which might have been regarded as confirming the sincerity of the British desire that India should realise her nationhood. A number of things were done in anticipation, so to speak, of India's attainment of full national status.

Measures were taken, in the first place, to equip India with the national military and civil services she would one day need. The Indian Army had been created as an instrument of the British Government, and in 1919 it contained no fully commissioned Indian officers. In 1923 a scheme was launched for building up a number of units entirely officered by Indians. In 1931 this was expanded to the equivalent of one division and one cavalry brigade. The number of places reserved for training Indian officers at Sandhurst was doubled in 1927, and an Indian Sandhurst was opened at Dehra Dun in 1934. The process of 'Indianising' the civil services was similarly speeded up. As has been pointed out in an earlier chapter,<sup>1</sup> the vast majority of officials in India had

<sup>1</sup> See p. 46 above.

always been enlisted in the Provincial Services which consisted almost entirely of Indians, appointed and controlled by the Provincial Governments; but the personnel of the All-India Services, appointed and controlled by the Secretary of State, was still largely British. As regards the latter, the unanimous recommendations of the Royal Commission of 1923<sup>1</sup> were accepted and implemented. On the one hand all the All-India Services other than the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police were transferred to the control of the Provincial Governments which meant, broadly speaking, that no more British officials would be recruited for them. On the other hand the pace of 'Indianisation' in the I.C.S. and the I.P. was sharply accelerated. As a result the percentage of the Indian members in the I.C.S. has risen from 17 in 1924 to over 50 in 1944, and in the I.P. from 11 to over 30.

Still more significant was the new status accorded to India in international relations. It was in this period that, by a process beginning with the Declaration of 1926 and ending with the Statute of Westminster in 1931, the British Commonwealth attained its final form as a society of independent nations, linked together of their own free will and on a footing of complete equality. India, of course, was not yet an independent nation. Her relations with other nations were controlled, as they are still controlled, by the British Government. Nevertheless, from 1918 onwards, India was recognised as a separate nation and represented in her own right and mainly by her own Indian delegates both at Imperial and at international Conferences. Thus Indian representatives, like those of the Dominions, separately signed the Treaty of Versailles, and, though all subsequent members of the League of Nations were required by the Covenant to be 'fully self-governing', India was one of the original members and Indians took an active share in the work of the League and of the International Labour Office. Though in law they were ultimately responsible to the Secretary of State, in fact they were free, except on primary issues of foreign policy, to defend India's interests in their own way and to differ from the representatives of Britain.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The personnel of this Commission was half British (Sir Reginald Craddock, Sir Cyril Jackson, Mr. D. Petrie, and Professor R. Coupland) and half Indian (Sir Muhammad Habibullah, Mr. Bhupendranath Basu, Mr. N. M. Samarth, and Mr. Hari Kishan Kaul) with Lord Lee of Fareham as Chairman.

<sup>2</sup> A striking example was the successful defence of the interests of Indian lascars by the Indian delegates in opposition to the British delegates at the Labour Conference on maritime questions in 1920.

But the most striking manifestation of the new status accorded to India was the so-called 'Fiscal Convention'. The Parliamentary Committee of 1919, representing both Houses and all parties, had declared that, 'whatever be the right fiscal policy for India, it is quite clear that she should have the same liberty to consider her interests as Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and South Africa'.<sup>1</sup> It was accordingly decided that, if the Central Indian Government and Legislature were agreed on their fiscal policy, the Secretary of State would not exercise his overriding power on behalf of British interests. The upshot was the establishment of an Indian Tariff Board and the framing of a tariff which, in the teeth of strong protests from British manufacturers, imposed substantial duties on a number of British imports. On cotton goods the rate rose to 20 per cent. with direct and painful effect on the industry in Lancashire. Nor was this offset by any increase in the total volume of British trade with India. On the contrary the share of India's trade obtained by Britain had fallen by 1935 to less than 40 per cent., while the share obtained by foreign countries had risen to over 50 per cent.

Thus the traditional British method of constitutional advance, by establishing usages and conventions without changing the law—the method which had been applied to the Dominions before the ultimate legal change in 1931—was applied to India also. Just as the Dominions had exercised *de facto* the powers of full self-government long before their legislative autonomy was recognised *de jure* by the Statute of Westminster, so India was now obtaining *de facto* some of the attributes of Dominion Status while still *de jure* subordinate to Britain. Congress spokesmen, however, true to their new doctrine of British perfidy, brushed all these developments aside as mere pretences intended to disguise the hard truth that Britain did not mean to loosen her imperial grip on India; and for that reason, if for no other, it was unfortunate that the British Government hesitated for several years to declare outright that Dominion Status was now in fact the goal of British policy in India. It was not till 1929 that Lord Irwin was authorised to declare that 'the natural issue of India's constitutional progress' as contemplated in the Announcement of 1917 was 'the attainment of Dominion Status'.

<sup>1</sup> *Joint Select Committee on Indian Reforms, 1919, Report*, p. 11.

## The Approach to Dominion Status

### I. THE NEHRU REPORT

THE Act of 1919 prescribed that the first inquiry into the possibilities of further constitutional advance should be undertaken in 1929. In 1927 the British Government decided to anticipate the date, and, the requisite amending Act having been passed, a Statutory or Parliamentary Commission, known from its chairman's name as the Simon Commission, was appointed. Thus began the most prolonged and thoroughgoing investigation of the problem of Indian government that had yet been held. It lasted till the passing of the Act of 1935, which embodied a new full-scale constitution.

The first contribution to the inquiry was made by Indians. Early in 1928, when the Simon Commission was only at the beginning of its labours, a conference, representing all Indian parties, was held to consider the drafting of a new constitution, and, finding that its progress was obstructed by the old communal discord, it appointed a committee of nine, including two Moslems and one Sikh, with Pandit Motilal Nehru, a leading Congressman, as chairman and his son, Jawaharlal Nehru, as secretary, to consider 'the principles of the Constitution of India' with special reference to the communal problem. Since it was not concerned with the details of a full-dress constitution, the Committee was able to complete the so-called 'Nehru Report' within three months.

There was a difference of opinion at the outset on the basic question which had been raised by the alteration of the Congress constitution in 1920;<sup>1</sup> and it was decided by a majority only and not by the whole Committee that Dominion Status should be accepted as the goal. But it was agreed that its attainment was to be regarded 'not as a remote stage of our evolution but as the next immediate step'. The new constitution, therefore, should be modelled on the Dominion constitutions, and full responsible government should be at once established at the Centre as well as in the Provinces. It was thus taken for granted that the parliamentary system would continue to operate in both fields. The Report dealt rather summarily with the constitutional issues raised by the retention of British troops in India for purposes of defence.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 119 above.

As to foreign policy it declared that a free India would deal with it, like the Dominions, in association with the other members of the Commonwealth.

The treatment of the problem of the States was somewhat high-handed. Their Rulers' right to choose their own path was not questioned; but they were plainly told that, if a federal constitution were adopted, their adherence to it would only be welcome, or indeed possible, if their systems of government were modified. Nor should their non-adherence be allowed to obstruct the attainment of Dominion Status by the rest of India. The new responsible Government of British India would take over from the British Government its existing rights and obligations towards the States. This brusque suggestion was accompanied by a sharp warning. No attempt must be made 'to convert the Indian States into an Indian Ulster', and it must be recognised that their peoples would not for ever submit to autocratic government, nor the people of British India for ever refrain from making common cause with them.

It was the other major problem of Indian unity, the Hindu-Moslem schism, which, as their terms of reference had forecast, occupied most of the Committee's time and was treated in most detail; and in view of subsequent attempts to minimise its gravity it stands to the Committee's credit that they faced it firmly and made a constructive effort to solve it. While the conviction was expressed that, once India had been freed from foreign control, communal dissensions would be overlaid by a new social and economic pattern of politics, it was admitted that at present they 'cast their shadow over all political work' and that some settlement of the Hindu-Moslem question at any rate must be written into the new constitution. On this issue the Nehru Report broke away from the Lucknow Pact. It reverted to the earlier Hindu repudiation of separate electorates. Going further, it recommended the abolition even of reserved seats in Provinces in which the Moslems were in a majority and of 'weightage' in those in which they were in a minority. Moslems, it was implied, must be content with the security afforded them by the principle of Provincial autonomy. If, as was recommended, the North-West Frontier Province were endowed with the same full measure of Provincial self-government as the rest and if Sind were separated from Bombay, there would be four Provinces in which the Moslems, being a majority, would be able to protect themselves.

From the Moslem standpoint the force of this argument—on which was presently to be based the so-called 'balance' doctrine,



i.e. the balancing of Moslem-majority Provinces against Hindu-majority Provinces—was weakened by the Committee's allegiance to the tradition of unitary government established by British rule. Though they must surely have regarded an ultimate union of British and Indian India as wellnigh inconceivable except on a federal basis, they spoke of Federation as a possibility only; and the outline constitution they appended to their Report could hardly be called federal. It carried devolution no further than the Act of 1919 had carried it. It reserved 'residual powers' to the Centre.<sup>1</sup> It provided for the continued direct election of the lower house of the Central Legislature by general British Indian constituencies and, while the upper house was to be elected by the Provincial Legislatures, a cardinal principle of all existing Federations was negated by the allotment to each Province not of the same number of seats but of a number proportionate to its population.

The sequel to this first bold attempt by Indian nationalists to settle the principles of an Indian constitution was a striking intimation of the difficulties that lay ahead. So far from strengthening the forces making for nationhood, it weakened them. So far from promoting national unity, it aggravated the old dissensions. On one vital point nationalist opinion itself was divided. When the Congress discussed the Report at its annual Session at the end of 1928, the dispute which had occurred in the Committee as to India's future association with the British Commonwealth was revived, and this time the majority, including Jawaharlal Nehru, repudiated Dominion Status and declared that 'there can be no true freedom till the British connexion is severed'.<sup>2</sup> As for Indian India, the proposal that the obligations of the treaty-system and the exercise of 'paramountcy' should be transferred to a Cabinet of British Indian politicians could only intensify the anxiety with which the Princes had been watching the growth of nationalism in the Provinces, and the breach was still further widened when the Congress at that same Session confirmed the minatory attitude of the Report by formally assuring the peoples of the States of its sympathy with 'their legitimate and peaceful struggle for full responsible government'.<sup>3</sup> No less significant was the reaction of the Moslems. The Report gave new life to the League's agitation.

<sup>1</sup> Residual powers in a federal system are powers for dealing with subjects which are not in the field of government when the constitution is drafted and therefore cannot be specified therein. Their importance in an age of scientific invention is illustrated by the development of air transport and broadcasting.

<sup>2</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, p. 27.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

and left wings, the latter still led by Mr. Jinnah, were united in opposition to it and in repudiation of the Moslems who had signed it. On January 1 1929, an All-India Moslem Conference adopted a full-scale manifesto of Moslem claims of which the most important were that the future constitution must be federal with the maximum of autonomy and the 'residual powers' vested in the Provinces; that separate electorates and 'weightage' must be retained; and that Moslems must have their due share in the Central and Provincial Cabinets.

Thus at the outset of the long inquiry the main issues in the conflict of Indian opinion stood out clearly. They may be tabulated as follows:

1. The majority of the Congress held that a free India should break away from the British Commonwealth. Most other Indians were satisfied with the prospect of Dominion Status.

2. As regards the ultimate union of British and Indian India, the Princes held that this could only be brought about by their own free choice and that it did not necessitate the abolition of autocracy in the domestic affairs of the States. The Congress held that the unity of India required responsible government in the States and that it should be promoted by popular agitation.

3. For British India most Hindus contemplated a national government which, while conceding a measure of Provincial autonomy, would be as unitary as possible. The Moslems, backed (as will be seen) by the other minorities, insisted on a federation, and a loose federation in which the Provinces would have the maximum of autonomy.

4. All parties apparently desired or at least acquiesced in the retention of the British parliamentary system both in the Provinces and at the Centre. But Hindu opinion adhered more closely to the British model than Moslem opinion. The Hindus accepted communal representation at least in some of the Legislatures, but rejected separate electorates and 'weightage'. The Moslems insisted on retaining both, and also claimed that communal representation should be extended to the Executive.

## 2. THE SIMON REPORT

Partly because the Simon Commission was created by Parliament to advise Parliament and partly because it would be difficult to include representatives of all Indian parties in it without making it unmanageably large, its seven members were chosen from the

Lords and Commons and from all three parties—Conservative, Liberal, and Labour. It was, of course, intended to consult Indian opinion as fully as possible, but the purely British personnel of the Commission was resented by most Indian nationalists, including many who did not agree with the Congress claim that the future form of India's government should be determined by Indians only. It was arranged, accordingly, that Indian Committees should be appointed, both Central and Provincial, to co-operate with the Commission, and, at a later stage, an undertaking was given that a Round Table Conference, at which representatives of British India and the States would be associated with representatives of Britain, would be held before Parliament made its decisions. These steps placated most moderate opinion, but not that of the Congress leaders, at whose head Mr. Gandhi had now resumed his place. They demanded that the Conference should be committed *a priori* to the immediate establishment of Dominion Status, and, when that was refused, they reaffirmed the doctrine of secession.<sup>1</sup> During its two visits to India the Commission was boycotted by the Congress, and it was in an atmosphere of growing tension and hostility that it completed its long task. The Report was published in the spring of 1930.

The primary interest of the Simon Report, far the most complete study of the Indian problem that had yet been made, lay in its difference from its predecessor, the Montagu-Chelmsford Report. It was not a difference about the objective of British policy: the Announcement of 1917 was emphatically reaffirmed. It was a difference as to the constitutional method of attaining the goal. The two cardinal points of the Montagu-Chelmsford scheme were (1) the adoption of the British parliamentary system, progressively in the Provinces and prospectively at the Centre, in the face of all previous British opinion, and (2) the recognition and encouragement of Indian nationhood by the creation of a Central Legislature for British India, directly elected on a unitary basis. The third main problem of India's future—the union of British and Indian India—was treated as not yet ripe for discussion: some sort of Federation was envisaged as a possibility of the distant future.

On the first of these points the Simon Report made it clear that the 'faith' which had prompted the adoption of the parliamentary system had not yet been justified. The Indian leaders had not been inspired by their new liberties and the vision of their coming nationhood to overcome by their own efforts the obstacles which

<sup>1</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, p. 58.

prevented British institutions from working in India as they worked in Britain. Communal antagonism in particular had not diminished: it had steadily increased. Apart from the non-co-operating Congress, political parties, with scarcely an exception, were communal parties. But, recognising that ten years was a short time and that the failure to operate the Act of 1919 in accordance with its authors' hopes had been partly due to the weaknesses of dyarchy, the Simon Report did not recommend that the parliamentary system should be abandoned in the Provinces and some other form of responsible government adopted. On the contrary it recommended that the gradual process of extending the parliamentary system should now be completed at one stroke. All departments, including finance and law and order, should now be 'transferred'. There should be a single Provincial Ministry, responsible for all Provincial affairs to the Legislature, and only checked by powers entrusted to the Governor—'safeguards' they were soon to be called—to override his Ministers on certain specified matters. As to the Legislatures, the most glaring departure from British practice, communal representation, aggravated by separate electorates, was denounced as such in the Simon Report no less frankly than in its predecessor, but for the same reason it was accepted as unavoidable for the present. 'No third party, however friendly and disinterested, can do what the two communities might co-operate in doing for themselves by mutual agreement.'<sup>1</sup> The Simon Commission seem, however, to have recognised for the first time that a non-British kind of Legislature logically implied a non-British kind of Executive, that the communal complexion of the one ought to be reflected in the other, or in other words that the Ministry ought always to be a Coalition Ministry in which all the major communities would be represented. But the Commission did not propose that such Coalitions should be made statutory, on the lines, for example, of the Swiss Constitution. They expressed the belief that they would be the almost automatic outcome of the communal composition of the Legislatures. 'In some Provinces we conceive that a reasonably stable Ministry is hardly possible without the inclusion of Ministers from the main minority groups. In others prudence would dictate the adoption of a similar course.'<sup>2</sup> Yet, while acquiescing in the continuance of the parliamentary system, modified by communalism, the Commission clearly betrayed their conviction that it was not the best possible system for India. In the same sort of language which

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, ii. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

British statesmen had so often used before 1917, they pointed out that the British parliamentary system had been slowly moulded by British character and history: it was like a garment, they said, which fits the wearer because it has been long worn, but will not necessarily fit any one else.<sup>1</sup> So, while they did not venture to ask the Indian intelligentsia to discard it, they declared that the adoption of the British system ought still to be regarded as an experiment and they suggested that the Provinces would be able to develop out of it, by usage and convention, the kind of government, not necessarily the same for all, which was best suited to their particular needs.<sup>2</sup>

On the second cardinal point, Indian nationhood and its embodiment in national institutions, the difference between the two Reports was still more marked. The Montagu-Chelmsford Report had only alluded to the possibility of Federation, and the recent Nehru Report had not gone much further. The Simon Report, on the other hand, assumed that Federation was the only practicable form of government for all India and urged that the constitutional machine should be at once adjusted to fit into a future Federation. This, as well as the desirability of allowing responsible government full play in the Provincial field, was given as a reason for the maximum devolution of power from the Centre to the Provinces. 'Each Province should as far as possible be mistress in her own house.'<sup>3</sup> The unity of India, it was argued, must be built up, like the unity of all existing Federations, not by overriding existing loyalties but by combining them for common purposes. To that end, also, the Central Legislature should be refashioned on a federal instead of a unitary pattern. Both houses should be indirectly chosen to represent the Provinces, not directly to represent general British Indian constituencies. Following federal precedent, the distribution of seats in the lower house should be based on population; in the upper house the same number of seats should be allotted to each Province.

It accorded with this basic idea of preparing the way for Federation that there should be no change for the present in the relations between Legislature and Executive at the Centre. The Central Executive, it was argued, should remain responsible only to the Secretary of State and Parliament until the Provinces had had some practical experience of their new and full self-government. As to the ultimate operation of the Centre the Report made only one prediction. Whatever might happen in the Provinces, the

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, ii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 17.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 16.

British parliamentary system could not be reproduced at the Federal Centre. 'The British model is not the only form of responsible government. It is possible to conceive of various methods whereby the Executive will become effectively responsible to the will of the Indian people. But it is too soon to say with certainty which line of advance will be adopted.'<sup>1</sup>

As to the inclusion of the States in a Federation of all India, the Report was as cautious as its predecessor. It only recommended a consultative Council of Greater India representing both its sections. Other steps towards unity, it said, were 'as yet too distant and too dim to be described'.<sup>2</sup>

The realism of the Simon Report can be better appreciated now than it was then. Its doctrine received little backing at the time of its publication. None of the Indian Committees which had worked alongside the Simon Commission produced unanimous Reports, but their majorities, broadly speaking, agreed with the Commission's opinion as to Provincial self-government but differed from it as to the Centre, where, it was urged, an instalment of responsible government or dyarchy should be introduced forthwith. A similar reaction was manifest in the long and important dispatch drafted by the Governor-General (Lord Irwin) and his colleagues in the Central Executive Council. The gist of it was 'Back to the Montagu-Chelmsford policy'. Federation was 'still a distant ideal', and it would be unwise so far to encourage Provincialism as to deprive the Centre of the strength which in an India exposed to the risks of external attack and internal dissension it so plainly needed.<sup>3</sup> To 'provincialise' the Central Legislature, moreover, would prematurely put a stop to an experiment which had so far proved successful. A directly elected unitary parliament was intended to appeal, and it had appealed, to Indian sentiment and it had thereby helped to foster the growing sense of nationhood. Nor was there good reason to abandon the British model at the Centre. 'We must look eventually to the emergence of a unitary responsible government.'<sup>4</sup> Meantime, while formal dyarchy was undesirable, a convention might be established that an increasing quota of the Executive Council should be chosen from among the party leaders in the Assembly and that the Council as a whole should be generally 'responsive' to their views except in such matters as foreign policy and defence.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, ii. 145-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 206.

<sup>3</sup> *Government of India's Dispatch* (1930), Cmd. 3700, 12-13, 190.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 101; cf. 16, 113.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

Thus, by 1930, the official inquiry had begun to divide on the main issues along roughly the same lines as party opinion in India. The Simon Commission tended towards the standpoint of the minorities, the Committees and the Indian Central Government towards that of the Hindu majority. But it would be unfair on that account to charge the Simon Commission with infidelity to the principle of Indian nationhood. True, they did not make the same emotional appeal to Indian patriotism as Mr. Montagu had made; and, while they gave the idea of a free and united Indian nation more substance by defining its federal framework, they stressed the length of time required for its actual realisation. They even refrained from mentioning Dominion Status. Nevertheless they never questioned that the cause of Indian nationalism must eventually prevail, and in one pregnant passage they showed their understanding of its source and strength.

We should say without hesitation that . . . the political sentiment which is most widespread among all educated Indians is the expression of a demand for equality with Europeans. . . . The attitude the Indian takes up on a given matter is largely governed by considerations of his self-respect. It is a great deal more than a personal feeling; it is the claim of the East for due recognition of status.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

During the two years and a half which the Simon Commission took to complete its work the hostility of the Congress steadily hardened. In 1930, shortly before the publication of the Report another 'civil disobedience' campaign was launched under Mr. Gandhi's personal command. It began with his dramatic 'march to the sea' to break the salt-law; its next stage was an organised attempt to prevent the sale of British goods. These 'non-violent' activities soon led, as before, to sporadic outbreaks of disorder and bloodshed. In Bengal and to a less extent in the Punjab there was an ugly renewal of terrorism. The strain on the forces of law and order was severe, but the challenge to authority was firmly met by Lord Irwin and his Council. The Congress organisation was declared illegal, and Gandhi and Nehru and several thousands of their followers were arrested.

This revolt revealed the growing strength and bitterness of Indian nationalism, but it was still mainly Hindu nationalism. At an All-India Moslem Conference in 1930, Mr. Muhammad Ali,

<sup>1</sup> *Simon Report*, i. 408.

a plain-speaking adventurous politician, who had been Mr. Gandhi's close ally in the days of the Khilafat movement, made a vigorous attack on Congress policy from the presidential chair. 'We refuse to join Mr. Gandhi', he said, 'because his movement is not a movement for the complete independence of India but for making the seventy millions of Indian Mussulmans dependents of the Hindu Mahasabha',<sup>1</sup> an association which had been founded in 1928 as a religious organisation for the conservation and purification of Hinduism, but which had recently begun to assume a political and markedly anti-Moslem complexion.

Meanwhile the British Government was carrying out its plan for a Round Table Conference in London. Its first Session opened in December 1930. Of its 89 members, 57 represented the various parties in British India—the Hindu Liberals, the Moslems, the Depressed Classes, the Sikhs and so forth, all the important parties, in fact, except the Congress. There were sixteen delegates from Indian India, including some of the leading Princes. Britain was represented by sixteen members of Parliament, drawn from all three parties, and led by Mr. Ramsay MacDonald, the head of the Labour Government of the day.

That the Conference would adopt the Simon Commission's recommendation of full responsible government in the Provinces was a foregone conclusion. It was to the national aspect of the constitutional question that interest was mainly directed, and as to that it was made clear at the very outset that the Indian delegates rejected the Commission's negative attitude towards an advance at the Centre. Princes and politicians alike, they voiced in chorus 'the claim of the East'. All of them agreed with the Maharaja of Bikaner when he said that 'the passion for an equal status in the eyes of the world . . . was the dominant force amongst all thinking Indians to-day'.<sup>2</sup> They all agreed, moreover, that that passion would be satisfied by Dominion Status, whatever the Congress might say. 'If you give India Dominion Status to-day', said Mr. Jayakar, a leftward Liberal, 'the cry of independence will die of itself'.<sup>3</sup> But this implied that the ideal of an Indian Federation, which the Simon Report had left in the clouds, could suddenly be brought to solid ground: it implied a union of British and Indian India; and it implied the withdrawal of all British control. To the general surprise the representatives of Indian India accepted the

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India*, 24 April 1930.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Round Table Conference* (1930-1), Cmd. 3778, 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.



first two of those implications, and not as a distant ideal but as a matter of immediate practical politics. The Princes, said the Nawab of Bhopal, were ready to join in a Federation now, provided that the Federal Government were, with some temporary reservations, responsible to the Federal Legislature.<sup>1</sup> On the third point the Indian delegates agreed with the British that there must be a period of transition—as there had been in the Dominions—during which certain powers would remain in British hands. ‘Provide as many safeguards as you can’, said the Liberal leader, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, ‘so long as those safeguards do not destroy the vital principle, and then go ahead with courage and with faith.’ On that understanding such hesitation as was still felt on the British side as to the immediate introduction of responsible government at the Centre was overcome by the Princes’ acceptance of a share in it. It was thought that they would furnish, to quote Sir Tej again, ‘a stabilising factor in our constitution’.<sup>2</sup> And the Princes’ move had a similarly reassuring effect on Moslem opinion, since, though the great majority of them are Hindus, they have always been regarded as less communal-minded than British Indian politicians and able on that account to exercise a neutralising influence in all-India politics. Thus, both the right and the left wings of the Moslem League, the latter led again by Mr. Jinnah, warmly welcomed the proposed Federation. They did not ignore the fact that the Hindu majority in India as a whole would necessarily be reflected at a Federal Centre; but, granted the maximum of Provincial autonomy and assuming that the North-West Frontier Province and Sind were soon conceded full Provincial status, they were content at this stage with the security afforded by the ‘balance principle’. ‘Luckily’, said Mr. Muhammad Ali, ‘there are Mussulman majorities in certain Provinces.’<sup>3</sup>

Unhappily this did not mean that the communal problem had been solved. The Moslems, echoed by the other minorities, made it plain that they would not acquiesce in any constitution which did not contain ‘adequate safeguards’ for their communal rights, particularly with regard to the system of representation. Hence at the meetings of the Minorities sub-committee—a body of 39 members, of whom 33 were Indians, with Mr. MacDonald in the chair—the old battle of the electorates was fought again with the same arguments and the same result. The Minorities still insisted on separate electorates. The only new feature was the claim

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Round Table Conference*, p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

advanced by Dr. Ambedkar on behalf of the Depressed Classes that they should be represented separately from the Hindu community at large.

At the close of the Session this communal dispute seemed to be the only important question that could not be settled by compromise and consent. All the other sub-committees—on Federal Structure, on the Provincial Constitution, on the Franchise, on the Services, and so forth—had agreed in principle, if not in detail; and the Prime Minister set the official seal on this general agreement when he announced the British Government's acceptance of the Federal plan, responsible government to be complete in the Provinces and qualified at the Centre by the reservation of certain subjects during a period of transition. As to the communal question, the new constitution, he said, must start 'with the goodwill and confidence of all the communities concerned', and it was their duty 'to come to an agreement among themselves'.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the communal deadlock the first Session of the Conference was thought to have proved a notable success. But there was admittedly one great flaw in it. The strongest Indian party, the party which most appealed to Indian youth, the party without whose co-operation no new constitution could work smoothly, had had no part in the proceedings. An earnest attempt was therefore made to induce the Congress to attend the second Session. In the spring of 1931 Lord Irwin, after close personal discussion with Mr. Gandhi, concluded with him the 'Irwin-Gandhi Pact', which provided for the release of 'political prisoners' on the one hand and for the suspension of the 'civil disobedience' movement on the other. It was part of the understanding that the Congress would no longer boycott the Conference, and, when the second Session opened in September, Mr. Gandhi and a number of other Congressmen were present. Those others, however, attended only as individuals. Mr. Gandhi was the sole official spokesman of the party; and the gist of the text he was to speak to had been settled by a resolution of the Working Committee,<sup>2</sup> which, it may be supposed, he had himself taken a hand in drafting. It declared that the new constitution must 'give the nation control' over all its affairs, including foreign policy and defence, and acknowledge its right to secede at will from the British Commonwealth. The Congress, in fact, as was to be expected, did not propose to say ditto to what had been more or less agreed on in its absence. It was prepared to acquiesce in Dominion Status, but only if it was given in full and at once.

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Round Table Conference*, pp. 507-8.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 167 below.

Mr. Gandhi duly carried out his mandate. 'I am here', he told the Conference, 'very respectfully to claim, on behalf of the Congress, complete control over the defence forces and over foreign affairs.' Granted that, he did not himself aspire to 'complete independence'. He desired a partnership between India and Britain—'if God wills it, an indissoluble partnership'—but it must be a partnership of equals, equally free to disrupt it if they chose.<sup>1</sup> Thus the general consensus of opinion which had been established at the first Session was inevitably broken at the second. The 'right of secession' was a relatively academic point since, whatever the legal position might be, it was not disputed that a Dominion was in fact free to secede. The major point was the demand for the immediate control of defence and foreign policy; and on this, though he said he 'could count no sacrifice too great if by chance he could pull through an honourable settlement',<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gandhi was uncompromising. He made it plain, moreover, that he regarded the opinions of the other Indian parties as relatively unimportant. The Congress, he declared, stood for the whole of India. It alone was a national, not a sectional or communal organisation. It represented not only all the 'dumb millions' of countryfolk, but all classes and creeds. Many Moslems and members of the other minorities were in its ranks. It claimed 'by right of service to represent even the Princes', since it had refrained from interference in their domestic affairs.<sup>3</sup> More than that, the Congress was the only proper representative of India at the Conference, since all its other delegates had been nominated by the Government, not chosen by the Indian people—an assertion which at once provoked the retort that all the chief parties in British India were in fact represented by their elected presidents or ex-presidents or other leading members.

This was the first statement, on a public official occasion, of the one-party doctrine which was presently to prove the main obstacle to an Indian settlement of the constitutional problem. And Mr. Gandhi gave another intimation of what lay ahead. In the light of the Congress claim it was logical enough that, as its sole spokesman, he should regard himself as representing all India at the Conference. But there were moments at which he seemed to view this unique position as a permanent feature of Indian politics. It may have been merely a figure of speech when, for example, he

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Round Table Conference* (Second Session), *Proceedings of Committees*, 17, 387-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the Conference*, 393.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

spoke of expecting to exercise command over the British and Indian armies in a free India; but it seemed to suggest that, while the Congress was the master of India, he was the master of the Congress.

If agreement was not to be expected on the main issue, it was hoped that Mr. Gandhi might help to bring about some sort of compromise on the communal question. But his efforts, whole-hearted though they were, proved fruitless. At one stage he procured the adjournment of the Minorities sub-committee for a week during which he convened and presided over a series of informal meetings: but at the end of it he repeated 'with deep sorrow and deeper humiliation' his 'utter failure to secure an agreed solution of the communal question'.<sup>1</sup> He urged, however, that the work of constitution-making should not be held up, since a communal settlement might be reached by a judicial or arbitral process after the constitution had been completed. At this suggestion the attitude of the minorities hardened. Taking counsel together, they issued a joint statement that in the framing of the constitution their claims, with separate electorates at the head, must stand as a connected whole.<sup>2</sup>

It may be said, in sum, that, while Mr. Gandhi's personal relations with other members of the Conference and with the British public were of the friendliest, his participations in the discussions were of little practical value. If anything, he widened the rifts. Nor, in his absence from India, had the truce been maintained. A 'no-rent' campaign had been set on foot by the Congress in the United Provinces. A militant Moslem organisation, the 'Red Shirts', had been started in the North-West Frontier Province, and had made common cause with the Congress in defiance of the British Raj. There had been more terrorist murders in Bengal. On Mr. Gandhi's return to India at the end of 1931, the 'civil disobedience' movement was resumed, and early in 1932 Mr. Gandhi and other Congress leaders were again arrested.

Against this background of revolt the Conference steadily completed its work. In the course of 1932 Committees on the Franchise, on Federal Finance and on the States visited India and drafted their reports. In August, convinced after further discussion that there was no other way of resolving the deadlock, Mr. MacDonald announced that the British Government had adopted a provisional scheme for communal representation, afterwards known as the 'Communal Award'. It was based on the Lucknow

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Conference*, 390.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 550-5.

Pact, the only agreement on the question ever reached by the Hindu and Moslem leaders themselves. It had only two new features, the reservation of seats for women and the recognition of the Depressed Classes as a separate community with its own electorates. The latter concession was at once contested by Mr. Gandhi, in prison at Poona. Always professing himself a champion of the outcastes and always regarding them as part of the Hindu community, he produced a scheme which conceded them more seats at the expense of the caste Hindus but confined their separate electorates to a 'primary' stage at which panels of candidates would be chosen to stand at subsequent elections by general Hindu constituencies. Neither the caste-Hindu leaders nor those of the Depressed Classes welcomed this scheme, but, when Mr. Gandhi began a 'fast unto death', they submitted, and the British Government for its part acquiesced in the amendment of the 'Communal Award' by the so-called 'Poona Pact'.

The third and last Session of the Conference opened in November 1932 and closed on Christmas Eve. It was mainly concerned with reaffirming the decisions already taken on the outlines of the constitution and filling in some of the detail. Two main points may be stressed. As to the composition of the Central Legislature, the traditional federal device—the upper house elected on a Provincial, the lower on a national basis—was generally accepted; but the conflict between the unitary and federal principles as to 'residuary powers' was not resolved. The Hindus continued to press for their allocation to the Centre, the Moslems for their allocation to the Provinces. The second major point was of much greater importance, but it was scarcely noticed at the time. From first to last the Conference took it for granted that the new constitution would operate, both at the Centre and in the Provinces, in accordance with the British parliamentary system. Only once was this assumption questioned.

British Parliamentarians though we be [said Lord Peel on behalf of the British Conservative delegates], we have not thought that our parliamentary methods should be transferred wholesale from Westminster to Delhi, but have suggested that we might well consider for India the Swiss or American parliamentary models.<sup>1</sup>

That brief echo of Morley and Balfour and Salisbury and Mill was heard in the course of the first debate of the first Session. It evoked no response, and it was not repeated at the second

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Round Table Conference* (1930-I), 447.

Session or the third. The 'faith' of 1917-19 had evidently survived the scepticism of the Simon Report.

The mood of the Conference was not quite so sanguine at its end as at its opening stages. The main structure stood, but the stability of its foundations seemed uncertain. The Princes' initial ardour for a Federation of all India had lost its edge, and British India itself was still divided. The communal breach had only been bridged by the unilateral decision of the British Government, and the breach between the Congress and all the other parties concerned had widened. Nevertheless the Conference had done a great work. It had faced the difficulties of making India a free nation more fully and frankly than they had ever been faced before, and it had resulted in a wide measure of agreement or at least acquiescence as to how they should be overcome.

#### 4. THE ACT OF 1935

The last stage of the long inquiry was parliamentary. In the spring of 1933 the proposals adopted by the British Government in the light of the Conference were submitted to a Joint Select Committee of both Houses with Lord Linlithgow in the chair. The strongest body of this kind ever set up, it made itself still stronger by inviting the leading Indian members of the Conference to come back and share in its deliberations. After sitting for eighteen months and examining a multitude of witnesses, it reported broadly in favour of the Government's proposals, and at the end of 1934 a bill embodying its recommendations was introduced. It was tenaciously resisted at each stage by the right-wing Conservatives led by Mr. Churchill in the Commons and Lord Salisbury in the Lords. On the crucial second reading it was carried by 404 votes to 133 in the Commons and by 236 to 55 in the Lords. On 4 August 1935 it received the Royal assent.

The content of the Act was twofold: it established a 'Federation of India' and it provided new constitutions for the Provinces of British India. Over the latter Parliament possessed full authority, and the Provincial part of the Act came into force, as prescribed, on 1 April 1937 and is operating now. But Parliament could not legislate for Indian India, and it was therefore provided that the Federal part of the Act should come into force only when a specific number of States had acceded to it. No State has yet acceded. Thus, while the Provinces have been working the new

constitution since 1937, the Centre has remained the old Centre, set up by the Act of 1919.

The more important provisions of the Provincial part of the Act may be summarised as follows.

1. It provided for the creation of two new Provinces, Sind and Orissa,<sup>1</sup> and set them, together with the North-West Frontier Province, on an equal footing with the older Provinces, making eleven in all.

2. It completed the development of Provincial autonomy by giving the Provinces a separate legal personality and liberating them entirely from the 'superintendence, direction, and control' of the Central Government and thereby of the Secretary of State, except for certain 'safeguards'.

3. Subject to these 'safeguards', the Act and the Instructions issued under it established full responsible government in all the Provinces. All departments of provincial administration were now to be controlled by Ministers responsible to their Legislatures, and the Governors were instructed to accept their Ministers' advice except in those matters such as the summoning of the Legislatures or assenting to bills as to which they were to 'act in their discretion', and in those matters, called 'special responsibilities', as to which they were to 'exercise their individual judgement'. The latter were the so-called 'safeguards'. There were seven of them. The most important were 'the prevention of any grave menace to the peace or tranquillity of the Province' and 'the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of minorities'.

4. If it should become impossible to carry on the government of a Province in accordance with the Act, the Governor would be entitled by proclamation to assume control of the whole administration at his discretion for a period of six months (Section 93).

5. Representation in the Legislatures was arranged in accordance with the 'Communal Award' as modified by the 'Poona Pact'. The franchise was extended to cover roughly 30 million voters in British India as a whole.

The more important provisions of the Federal part of the Act may be summarised as follows.

1. It established a bicameral Federal Legislature in which

<sup>1</sup> Sind was separated from Bombay, and Orissa, the country of the Oriya-speaking people, from Bengal and Madras. The Act (25 and 26 G. v, chap. 42) also separated Burma from India and provided it with a constitution based on the same principles as the Indian constitution. This part of the Act was re-enacted at the next parliamentary session as a separate Government of Burma Act (26 G. v and E. viii, chap. 2).

British India and the States were to be represented roughly in the proportion of two to one. The representatives of British India in the upper house were to be directly elected on a population basis;<sup>1</sup> those in the lower house were to be indirectly elected by the Provincial Legislatures, but also on a population basis. The representatives of the States in both houses were to be appointed by their rulers. Communal representation was to be retained on the same lines as in the Provinces.

2. Lists were appended to the Act of those matters in which the Federal and Provincial Legislatures would have sole or concurrent authority. 'Residual powers' were to be allotted, as occasion arose, by the Governor-General at his discretion—a compromise between the unitary and federal schools of thought.

3. Dyarchy, abandoned in the Provinces, was to be introduced at the Centre. All departments, except defence and foreign affairs,<sup>2</sup> were to be in charge of Ministers, responsible only to the Legislature, and the Governor-General was to be instructed to accept their advice with similar 'safeguards' to those prescribed in the Provinces. For assisting him in the control of foreign affairs and defence the Governor-General was to appoint 'Counsellors' who might or might not be members of the Legislature and would be responsible only to him.

4. As to finance, such items as the salaries of the Governor-General, Ministers, and Judges and the cost of the 'reserved' departments would be made, like the corresponding items in the Provinces, a first charge on the revenue and withdrawn from the vote of the Legislature. Currency was to be controlled by the Reserve Bank (established under a separate Act in 1934).

Two points may be noted. (1) The Federation was to be of the closer rather than the looser type. In particular the representation in both houses of the Federal Legislature was to be based on population and not, as in all other Federations, on the equal representation of the federating units in one house. To that extent Hindu 'unitarianism' had prevailed. (2) It was assumed that, while the composition of the Federal Government would in practice be affected by its federal character as in other Federations, the British parliamentary system would otherwise operate at the Centre as in the Provinces.

<sup>1</sup> Six of the 156 seats were reserved for nomination by the Governor-General.

<sup>2</sup> 'Ecclesiastical affairs' were also 'reserved', but these are concerned only with the maintenance of the churches and chaplains needed as long as British soldiers and officials continue to serve in India.



Based as it was on the discussions of the Conference, the Act of 1935—a great achievement of constructive political thought—obtained a considerable measure of Indian backing. The Princes, if no longer in the mood to welcome it, at any rate could not object to it, since it left their right of self-determination wholly unimpaired. The Hindu Liberals were disappointed. They held, and rightly, that after the British general election of 1931, parliamentary opinion, now predominantly Conservative and under pressure from the 'diehard' group, had tended towards a stiffening of the precautionary or restrictive provisions of the Act. In particular they would have liked it laid down that the Governor-General's 'Counsellors', though responsible only to him, should be Indian members of the Legislature, and they complained that the financial reservations were needlessly strict. But they had never abandoned their conviction that a period of transition with some sort of safeguards was unavoidable; and, if they were not satisfied with the Act, at least they acquiesced in it and wanted Indians to use what it gave them in order to get more. 'The constitution should be given a fair trial,' said Sir Cowasmi Jehangir as President of the National Liberal Federation in 1936. 'Its success must ultimately lead to a vast expansion of powers, equal to those enjoyed by the Dominions.'<sup>1</sup>

The Moslems, followed by the other minorities, similarly acquiesced. Some of them may have had misgivings, but they seem to have felt that their communal rights would be sufficiently secured (1) by the continuance of separate electorates and 'weight-age', (2) by the 'safeguards' for minorities, (3) by the composite or coalition character which it was thought the Governments would inevitably assume, in the Provinces as well as at the Centre, though it was not necessitated by the Act, and (4) by the neutralising influence which the representatives of the States might be expected to exert at the Centre.

The Congress alone condemned the Act outright. The attitude it had adopted at the outset of the inquiry had only been hardened by the course of the subsequent discussion. It would not co-operate in freeing India with a Britain it did not trust. It would free India in its own way. What that way should be was defined for the first time in a resolution of the annual Session of 1934. After a vigorous rejection of the British Government's proposals for the framing of the prospective bill, it declared that 'the only satisfactory alternative' was 'a constitution drawn up by a

<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, no. 106, p. 385.

Constituent Assembly elected on a basis of adult suffrage or as near it as possible', and, if necessary, by separate electorates.<sup>1</sup> Whatever the practical possibilities might be, this proposal accorded in theory with Dominion precedent. The Canadians, Australians and South Africans had drafted their own national constitutions in constituent conferences or conventions.

The Congress' rejection of the Act marked the culminating point in the policy of non-co-operation it had maintained since 1920, and to foreign observers, acquainted only with the public speeches and writings of Congressmen, it may well have seemed not only a natural decision but one which any genuine Indian patriot was bound to make. For Congress propaganda ignored what the Act gave, and fastened on what it withheld. Every check and restriction, every reservation and safeguard, was listed, and in the light of this formidable array the Act was held up not only as a mockery of self-government but as a deliberate mockery. The restrictions, not the liberties, it was argued, were the essence of the Act, and by their rigorous enforcement the British Government intended to maintain its hold on India.

This was a misconstruction, for it overlooked the fact that British constitutional practice is based more on usage and convention than on law. A striking illustration of this familiar principle had recently been afforded, as it happened, in the Declaration of 1926 and the Statute of Westminster of 1931, whereby Dominion Status had been finally attested. The Declaration affirmed that, without any change in law, the Dominions had in fact acquired an equal status with Britain: they had for some time past been dealing with all their own affairs, including foreign policy. The Statute, similarly, in surrendering the British Parliament's legal right to legislate for the Dominions without their assent, was only a confirmation of what had come about by usage and convention: there had been no such overriding legislation for over half a century. Thus the British Parliament was merely giving away *de jure* a power it had long ceased to possess *de facto*. The moral of this applied directly to the Act of 1935. The reservations and safeguards were certainly intended to be real, and all Indian opinion outside the Congress had agreed that something of the sort was needed during the period of transition to full Dominion Status. But to the British mind the liberties conceded by the Act were of greater practical moment than the restrictions it retained for the simple reason that, if the liberties were well used, the restrictions,

<sup>1</sup> *Congress in Evolution*, p. 30

though still embodied in the law, would cease to operate in fact. British Ministers made no secret of their hopes in this respect. It was pointed out that the safeguards were only intended to prevent Indian Ministers from doing what by common consent they ought not to do.<sup>1</sup> Given wise ministers, they would not be used, and through disuse they would become obsolete. As regards the reservations, it was explained that the Act had been deliberately framed so as to make possible the attainment of Dominion Status without further major legislation. There was nothing in it to prevent the Governor-General, with the Secretary of State's concurrence, appointing Indian members of the Federal Legislature as his 'Counsellors' in the 'reserved' field of foreign policy and defence and making it more and more customary to accept their advice, until in fact, by usage and convention, responsible government had been established as fully at the Centre as in the Provinces.<sup>2</sup>

Viewed in this light, the Act of 1935 made it possible for India to attain Dominion Status by Indian efforts and without any more of those British discussions and decisions which had marked all the previous stages of her constitutional advance. It was not questioned by British public opinion at the time that, if the Act were so used as to demonstrate that India was capable of national self-government, the British Parliament would not refuse to surrender what remained of its responsibilities in India to the Indian Parliament. Nor was it generally supposed that this period of transition need be long. The hopeful British mood of 1917-19 seemed, indeed, to have revived, and it was quickened now by a new understanding of the possibilities of international co-operation inherent in the British Commonwealth of Nations and by the desire that India should take her place in it beside the Dominions, so that it might serve as a link between East and West. But such hopes could only be fulfilled on two conditions. The first and less vital was the willingness of Indian India to unite with British India in one national federation—less vital because, despite its general undesirability and practical difficulty, it would not be impossible in the last resort for British India to acquire Dominion Status by itself. The second and more vital condition was the co-operation of the Congress—more vital because, as far as British India was concerned, the new constitution, fulfilling Macaulay's

<sup>1</sup> *Joint Select Committee on Indian Constitutional Reform, Evidence*, Q. 5978.

<sup>2</sup> As to defence, Sir Thomas Inskip, speaking for the British Government, suggested the possibility of bilateral agreements outside the operation of the Act: *Hansard*, ccxcvii (1934-5), 1611-13. See p. 280 below.

dream of a century back, was based on representative government: it could only be sustained by the votes of the Indian people, and, as was soon to be made manifest, the Congress could command too many of those votes to allow the constitution to work, except in a limited area and to a limited extent, without its co-operation. In the event those two conditions were not realised. If they had been, and if in consequence the whole of the Act had come into force by general consent before the outbreak of the war in 1939, the whole complexion of the Indian problem might conceivably have been changed. Not only the representatives of the Provinces and the States but also the leaders of the great communities might have quickly acquired a new consciousness of national unity through working side by side in the nation's service—all the more quickly, perhaps, because at the outset the neutral British arbiter was still there, ready to assist in compromise and conciliation and with the 'safeguards' at his hand if in the last resort they should be needed. And, if at the Centre as well as in the Provinces the constitution of 1935 could thus have made an auspicious start, it seems not possible merely, but probable, that the process of advance by convention would have been stimulated by the impact of war and that by now a united India would have attained *de facto* Dominion Status and with it her national independence.

## VI

# Provincial Self-Government

### I. THE INTERIM, 1935-7

WHEN the Act of 1935 was passed, it was already clear that the Princes had begun to recoil from the warm approval they had given to the federal idea in 1930. They now seemed less interested in achieving the unity of India than in preserving their own autonomy. For some time past they had been protesting against the extent to which the Paramount Power claimed by right of usage and sufferance to interfere in the domestic affairs of their States, and they had been dissatisfied with the Report of the Indian States or Butler Committee (1929) which, while it declared that a responsible Indian Government in British India could not take over the existing duties of the British Government towards the States without their rulers' consent, insisted that 'Paramountcy must remain paramount'.<sup>1</sup> Raising this issue again in their discussion of the Act, the Princes' representatives went so far as to assert that their adherence to the proposed Federation would be in the nature of a bilateral agreement between allies and equals—a claim that was promptly rejected by the Secretary of State. As to the details of the federal scheme, the objections they raised to the infringements of their domestic sovereignty which it necessarily entailed seemed to suggest that, now that they were face to face with Federation, they were not really willing to allow the Federal authorities to exercise within their States the minimum powers required by any Federal system.

Of the British Government's desire that the whole of the Act and not merely the Provincial sections of it should come into force as soon as possible there was no question. Lord Linlithgow, who became Governor-General in the spring of 1936, had taken a prominent part in the framing of the Act, and it was known that he aspired to presiding over its full operation before his five-year tenure of office had expired. A few months after his arrival, he sent a number of personal representatives to the States to discuss the question of accession with their rulers and ministers. But the collation and consideration of their reports took a long time, and it was not till the beginning of 1939 that Lord Linlithgow was able to make known to the Princes the terms on which the British

<sup>1</sup> *Report of the Indian States Committee*, Cmd. 3302, 31.

Government would agree to their adherence. By then, as will be seen, the old division between British and Indian India had widened again, and it seemed as if the prospect of Federation had become almost as distant as it had been before the Round Table Conference.

Meantime the constitution of 1919 was still functioning. In Provincial politics there was no important development: it was a period of waiting for the end of dyarchy and the coming of full responsible government; and public interest was mainly concentrated on the Centre. Mr. Gandhi and Pandit J. L. Nehru had been released in 1933, and the 'civil disobedience' movement had been finally suspended in 1934. In the course of that year Mr. Gandhi decided to resign from the Congress and devote himself to working for the uplift of the Depressed Classes and the encouragement of village industries; and this may have made it easier for the Congress to modify its policy of non-co-operation. It was decided by a majority that the Congress should not boycott the forthcoming elections to the Central Assembly, but should try to win as many seats as possible in order to oppose and obstruct the Government. The results revealed the Congress' electoral strength. The composition of the Assembly of 1935 was as follows: Congress 44, Nationalists (a section of Congressmen, mainly members of the Hindu Mahasabha) 11, Independents (all Moslems but 3) 22, Europeans (representing the resident British community) 11. There were 26 officials and 13 nominated non-officials. The Liberals, it will be noticed, had been virtually eliminated.

This distribution of seats meant that the Government was bound to be defeated if the Moslem Independents voted with the Congress, and it was soon evident that Mr. Jinnah, who had again become President of the Moslem League in 1934, was prepared to revive the *entente* of the Lucknow Pact period in the common cause of nationalism. On the constitutional issue he opposed the rejection of the Act as a whole, and the Congress motion to that effect was lost by 72 votes to 61. But he secured the backing of the Congress for three resolutions of his own, the first acquiescing in the 'Communal Award' pending an alternative settlement by the communities themselves, the second criticising the Provincial part of the Act but not condemning it outright, the third denouncing the Federal part as 'fundamentally bad and totally unacceptable' and demanding the prompt establishment of full responsible government in a federated British India. This alliance on constitutional questions was more or less consistently maintained on

others. In 1935 and again in 1936 it brought about the rejection of the budget and forced the Governor-General to 'certify' it. Never before, in fact, had the nationalist Opposition pressed the Government so hard as it did in this brief period of Hindu-Moslem co-operation. Of the fourteen occasions on which 'certification' was employed between 1921 and 1940, eight occurred in and after 1935.

This political concordat was mainly a matter of politics at Delhi. No appeal for communal peace and harmony was made by the Hindu or Moslem leaders to the country at large, nor was there any change in the old sombre record of communal strife. There were serious 'disturbances' at Karachi in 1935 and at Bombay in 1936, and there were the usual sporadic minor outbreaks at various places. But the significant, the encouraging point was that the record did not worsen. Though the two communities were now confronted with the immediate prospect of full responsible government in the Provinces and the promise of its partial introduction at the Centre, yet there was no such marked increase of communal tension as there had been at previous stages of constitutional advance.

## 2. THE PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

As will be explained in the next chapter, the policy of the Congress is normally determined by the Working Committee, a body of fourteen, headed by the President. Though Mr. Gandhi was now no longer a member of it—or indeed, in form, of the Congress itself—he usually attended the Committee's meetings and, as will appear, he soon came to exercise a dominant influence over its decisions. Of its members the best-known to the public has been Pandit Nehru. A master of fluent English, he has been mainly responsible for the drafting of the long series of resolutions in which the Congress has expounded its policy to the world at large. He is personally devoted to Mr. Gandhi, but he does not share all his opinions. He is the leader of the Congress Left, a socialist, an agnostic, and not a pacifist. He was elected President in 1936 and 1937, and in his address at both the annual Sessions he preached the doctrine of revolutionary nationalism in the frankest terms. He spoke of the imminent crisis in Europe as an opportunity for the Congress to attain its goal.

The time might come, and that sooner perhaps than we expect, when we might be put to the test. Let us get ready for that test.

Every war waged by imperialist powers will be an imperialist war whatever the excuses put forward; therefore we must keep out of it.<sup>1</sup>

If war comes or other great crisis, India's attitude will make a difference. We hold the keys of success in our hands if we but turn them rightly.<sup>2</sup>

Meantime, said the Pandit, the Act of 1935, 'a new charter of slavery', must be rejected root and branch. Congressmen should certainly contest the forthcoming Provincial elections, but they should on no account take part in any Provincial Government. 'It would be a fatal error for the Congress to accept office. That would inevitably involve co-operation with British imperialism.'<sup>3</sup> But on this point the Pandit did not carry all his colleagues with him. Several leading Congressmen wanted to get control of the Provincial administration if they could, partly because they believed that it would help them to get control of the Centre later on, partly because office would enable them to introduce at once the schemes of social betterment which had long been associated in Congress propaganda with the cause of national freedom. Thus the Congress election manifesto, while it accepted Pandit Nehru's view that the purpose of entering the Provincial Legislatures was 'not to co-operate in any way with the Act but to combat it and seek the end of it', postponed a decision on the question of accepting office till after the elections; and it contained a full-dress programme of social reform, especially in the agrarian field, which plainly could only be put into effect if office were accepted. On the communal issue the manifesto condemned the Communal Award as inconsistent with democratic principles and disruptive of Indian unity, but it confessed that 'a satisfactory solution of the communal question can come only through the goodwill and co-operation of the principal communities concerned'.<sup>4</sup>

Except for two purely Provincial parties, the Unionist Party in the Punjab and the Justice Party in Madras, the only other party of any importance besides the Congress was the Moslem League; and it seemed that Mr. Jinnah was anxious to extend to the Provincial arena the *entente* he had established at the Centre. The League's electoral manifesto,<sup>5</sup> drafted under his direction, differed on no vital point from that of the Congress. It put forward a

<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, No. 103, pp. 563-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, ii, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Speech at Madras, 1936: *Round Table*, No. 105, p. 144.

<sup>4</sup> J. Nehru, *The Unity of India* (London, 1941), p. 401.

<sup>5</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1936, i, 299-301.



similar social programme, and, as to the constitution, it maintained the position which Mr. Jinnah had taken up in the Assembly. It vigorously condemned the Federal part of the Act, but, while severely criticising the Provincial part, it declared that it ought to be worked 'for what it was worth'. But the most significant passage in the League's manifesto was that in which the Lucknow Pact was hailed as 'one of the greatest beacon-lights in the constitutional history of India' and as 'a signal proof of the identity of purpose, earnestness, and co-operation between the two great sections of the people of India'. This clearly implied that Mr. Jinnah desired to revive the Congress-League accord of 1916.

The extent to which the Congress had now spread its organisation over nearly the whole of British India was revealed by its electoral campaign. Virtually every village of any size had its Congress office and flag or at least its resident Congress agent. The campaign itself, the meetings and processions, the speakers and slogans, the prophecies of a coming millennium, 'stirred the countryside', reported one experienced observer, 'into a ferment such as it had never before experienced'.<sup>1</sup> Over 54 per cent. of the total electorate went to the poll. Many of them were so illiterate that coloured boxes were used for voting instead of ballot papers. For them the Congress war-cry was 'Vote for Gandhi and the yellow box'.<sup>2</sup>

The result was a great victory for the Congress, greater probably than its leaders had expected. Of the 1,585 seats in all the Provincial lower houses taken together the Congress won no less than 711. In five Provinces—Madras, the United Provinces, the Central Provinces, Bihar and Orissa—it obtained clear majorities. In Bombay it won nearly half the seats and could count on the support of two or three pro-Congress groups to give it a majority. In Assam it was the strongest party with 35 seats out of 108. The most striking result was in Madras where the Justice or anti-Brahmin Party, which had been in unbroken control of the Legislature since 1922, obtained only 21 seats in the lower house against the Congress' 159.

There was a communal aspect to these results. Six of the seven Provinces in which the Congress got a clear majority or proved the strongest party were Hindu-majority Provinces. The seventh was the North-West Frontier Province, where the militant or Red Shirt section of the overwhelming Moslem majority (92 per cent.),

<sup>1</sup> *Asiatic Review*, July 1940, pp. 424-5. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, January 1941, p. 21.

having no fears of Hindu domination and remembering its old alliance with the Congress, had identified itself with the Congress party and programme. But in the other three Moslem-majority Provinces the Congress fared badly. In Bengal it won 60 seats out of 250, in the Punjab 18 out of 175, in Sind 8 out of 60. Most of these seats were for Hindu constituencies. In the 482 Moslem constituencies in British India as a whole Congress Moslems contested 58 seats and won 26.

It may be said, therefore, that the elections had confirmed the 'balance' principle: they had produced Hindu majorities—if the Congress were reckoned as predominantly Hindu—in six Provinces and Moslem majorities in four. But there was a great difference between the two camps. The Congressmen in every Province were backed and disciplined by a single organisation, controlled (as will be seen in the next chapter) by its 'Central' executive. There was no such cohesion, no such unitary organisation in the other camp. In Bengal and Sind the Moslems were divided into warring sections. In the North-West Frontier Province the dominant section had made common cause with the Congress. In the Punjab the Unionist Party, which won 96 seats out of 175, professed to be a Moslem-Hindu-Sikh coalition; and, though most of its members were Moslems and some of them members of the League, the party was not identified with the League, still less in any way under its control. The League, in fact, was strongest in those Provinces in which there was no hope of a Moslem victory, particularly in the United Provinces, the heart of the old Mogul Empire, where the Moslems, though only about 16 per cent. of the population, are largely concentrated in the towns and have always played a part in Provincial politics out of proportion to their numbers.

### 3. THE CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS

In February 1937, when the full results of the elections were known, the Congress leaders drafted a resolution which was duly adopted by the All-India Congress Committee.<sup>1</sup> The Indian people, it declared, had given overwhelming proof that, in agreement with the Congress, they rejected the Act of 1935 and desired to frame their own constitution themselves by means of a Constituent Assembly—a somewhat rhetorical assertion, since only British India was concerned and only about half of its electorate

<sup>1</sup> See p. 167 below.

had voted, and the great majority of the Congress votes had been cast for Gandhi and agrarian reform with small interest in or understanding of the constitutional question. 'The Committee therefore demands', the resolution continued, 'on behalf of the people of India, that the new constitution be withdrawn.' Meantime Congress members of the Legislatures must conform to the policy of combating the Act—a policy which 'must inevitably lead to deadlocks with the British Government and bring out still further the inherent antagonism between British imperialism and Indian nationalism'.<sup>1</sup> As to the acceptance of office, it was decided by a majority that Congress Ministries might be formed provided that they obtained assurances that the Governors would not use their special powers to override their Ministers 'in regard to their constitutional activities'. When, therefore, the Act came into operation (1 April) and the Governors of the Provinces in which the Congress had obtained majorities invited their leaders to form Governments, they were met with a request for an undertaking in the terms of the resolution. Plainly they could not give it. They could not promise not to do what in certain circumstances they were required to do by the Act and by the Instructions they had sworn to obey. Thereupon the Congress leaders declined office.

The Governors were thus compelled to turn to the leaders of the minority parties, and Ministers were duly appointed on that basis. But this was only a suspension of the crisis; for under the law the Legislatures would have to be summoned within six months, and, when that happened, the position of the Ministers, confronted by hostile Congress majorities and unable in particular to carry their budgets, would become untenable. In the course of a few weeks, however, it became apparent that most of the Congress leaders, and especially the presumptive Premiers, really wanted to take office and had not meant the proviso about the 'safeguards' to bar the way. A long public controversy ensued in which Mr. Gandhi marked his reappearance in active politics by taking the lead on the Congress side. It was brought to an end in June by a statement of Lord Linlithgow in which he pointed out that the 'safeguards' were severely restricted in scope and were unlikely to cause an open breach between a Governor and his Ministers except on a major issue, and appealed to the Indian people to count on him 'to strive untiringly for the full and final establishment in India of the principles of parliamentary government'.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the controversy it was evident that the

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India*, 17 and 19 March 1937.   <sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 22 June 1937.

Governor-General and the Governors concerned, backed by the Secretary of State, were doing their best to persuade the Congress leaders to take office despite their declared antagonism to the constitution. Thus Lord Linlithgow's statement, though it surrendered no constitutional ground, was meant to be conciliatory and as such it was accepted. When the Congress Working Committee's decision was known, the 'interim' Ministries resigned, and Congress Ministries were appointed in their place. Early in the autumn the Legislatures met.

In two respects the Governments of the seven 'Congress Provinces' (Madras, Bombay, the United Provinces, Bihar, the Central Provinces, Orissa and the N.W.F.P.) differed from those of the four 'non-Congress Provinces' (Bengal, the Punjab, Assam and Sind). In the first place they were all 'pure' Congress Governments, i.e. composed of Congressmen only. Minorities were represented in them—the Moslems in most of them and the Scheduled Castes in two—but all of these minority Ministers were, or became for the purpose of appointment, members of the Congress. In the second place, all the Governments were committed to the same broad programme—the twofold election programme of 'combating' the constitution and of social reform—and all of them were watched and to some extent controlled by the Central Congress Executive. The reasons for this 'unitarian' policy and its results will be discussed in the next chapter.

The personnel of the Ministries was uneven. Most of the Ministers were elderly men—one of the unsatisfactory features of present-day Indian politics is the apparent lack of able young men in the field of leadership—and the Moslem representatives were mostly less capable than their colleagues. By common consent the outstanding figure was Mr. C. Rajagopalachari, Premier of Madras. His Ministry and the Bombay and U.P. Ministries were the best. The C.P. Ministry was the worst. The general level would have been higher if some of the more prominent Congress leaders—Pandit Nehru in the United Provinces, for example, or Dr. R. Prasad in Bihar—had not refrained from taking Provincial office and devoted their time to the work of the 'Central' Congress Executive.

Except in the Central Provinces,<sup>1</sup> all the Ministries maintained their internal coherence and stability during the two years and a half they were in office; and they were freed from external danger by their large and generally well-disciplined majorities in the Legis-

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 171-2 below.

latures. Nor were the fears they had professed of Governors' interference realised. Though there were doubtless several occasions on which the existence of the 'safeguards' was an important factor in the discussions between Ministers and Governors, the only instance of a formal use of them was in the United Provinces and Bihar in 1938 in connexion with the release of 'political prisoners'.<sup>1</sup> This brought about the resignation of the two Ministries concerned; but it was clear that their colleagues in the other Congress Provinces did not wish to extend the scope of the dispute, and, after conciliatory statements by Mr. Gandhi and Lord Linlithgow, it was amicably settled and the resignations withdrawn. In the field of legislation the great majority of the many bills carried by the Legislatures were signed by the Governors without demur. Several were reserved for consideration on legal points owing to over-hasty drafting. Only four were vetoed. The rest were returned with proposed amendments which the Legislatures accepted. The Governors' power to legislate by ordinance was never used. Thus, if the government of the Congress Provinces was not the full and direct responsible government which the authors of the Act of 1935 had intended, this was not due to British interference, but only (as will be explained in the next chapter) to that of the Congress 'Centre'. Those 'inevitable' deadlocks with the British Government did not in fact occur.

In all the Provinces the severest test of the new régime was in the field of law and order, but the Congress Ministers suffered at the outset from a handicap from which non-Congress Ministers were relatively free. Because they were members of a revolutionary organisation which had frequently been in open conflict with the Government and the law—many of them, indeed, had been in prison—they were bound to jib at the whole system of repression, to identify it with 'imperialism', and to regard it as unnecessary in a self-governing community. Associated with this attitude, which was strengthened in many Hindu minds by Mr. Gandhi's doctrine of 'non-violence', was a dislike and distrust of the existing civil services and particularly the police who, till very recently, had been engaged in watching Congress proceedings, breaking up Congress meetings and arresting Congressmen. Thus the new dispensation opened with a general attack on the methods of 'coercion'

<sup>1</sup> Since other Provinces, particularly Bengal, were affected, the two Governors were instructed by the Governor-General, in discharge of his 'special responsibility' for the peace of India, not to concur in their Ministers' advice.

employed under the old. 'Political prisoners' were released, emergency powers repealed, bans on illegal associations and activities lifted, and securities taken from dissident newspapers returned. Before long, however, these ideological preconceptions and policies were forced to yield to the hard necessities of maintaining law and order. There were serious and protracted agrarian disturbances in Bihar, promoted by the *kisan* or peasant societies in their disappointment at the postponement of the promised millennium. There was labour trouble from time to time in most of the Provinces, with alarming outbreaks in Bombay and Cawnpore. Nor had the agitation of political extremists, Communists and preachers of 'direct action', been silenced by the Congress triumph at the polls. But the worst and most dangerous cause of disorder was, as it had always been, communal strife. The barometer of rioting and fighting, which had stood so steady for some years past, began to fall again. When the Congress Ministries resigned in the autumn of 1939, there had been 57 serious communal outbreaks in their Provinces and more than 1,700 casualties of which over 130 had been fatal.

Confronted with these persistent and growing dangers, the policy of all the Congress Ministries—though more quickly in some cases than in others—was readjusted. Mr. Gandhi himself declared at an early stage that the doctrine of 'non-violence' did not require that incitement to violence should go unpunished;<sup>1</sup> and in 1938 the A.I.C.C. passed a resolution condemning the advocacy of 'murder, arson, looting, and class war' by individuals and the propagation of falsehood, violence and communal conflict by newspapers, and declaring that, while its policy of civil liberty was unchanged, the Congress would 'support measures that may be undertaken by the Congress Governments for the defence of life and property'.<sup>2</sup> And the measures that were undertaken were certainly firm. Old powers and precautions were resumed. Before the Congress Ministries came to an end there was little to distinguish their methods of repression from those employed in the non-Congress Provinces or indeed under the pre-1937 British régime.

At the same time Ministers' distrust of the police was dispelled—again more rapidly in some Provinces than in others—first by the sheer necessity of using them and drawing on their experience and next by the discovery that they were prepared to serve their new political masters as loyally as they had served their old official

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 23 October 1937.    <sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, ii. 278.

ones. The most striking evidence both of the anxiety with which the growth of communal strife was now regarded and of the spirit of co-operation in which all parties concerned desired to deal with it was furnished by a conference held at Simla in the spring of 1939. The Home Ministers of four Congress Provinces, attended by their chiefs of police, sat side by side not only with their 'opposite numbers' in the non-Congress Provinces, but also with the Home Member and other officials of the Central Government; and a unanimous resolution was carried recommending to all Provincial Governments a policy of concerted action and reciprocal help for the suppression of communal propaganda and violence.<sup>1</sup> It seemed as if the need of combating the gravest danger that threatened India's peace and unity was inspiring a new sense of common interest and purpose between the Provinces and the parties, and even between Indian nationalism and the British Government.

While the Congress Ministries were learning to operate the great administrative machine they had inherited from the old régime, they were also working at high pressure in the field of legislation. Bills were quickly, sometimes too quickly, drafted on the lines of the election programme, and were duly carried by safe majorities. The most important were those which dealt with tenancy and rent, especially in the United Provinces and Bihar. Much had been done by the old official Governments to protect the tenants' rights, but they had always been hampered by the fact that they were not popular Governments and that the bulk of their supporters belonged to the landlord class. The Congress Ministries, as had been expected, went much further in securing rights, fixing rents, and abolishing abuses, but without wholly alienating the landlords, many of whom were in the Congress ranks and sitting in the Legislatures. In all the Congress Provinces vigorous measures were also passed to relieve the peasantry from the stranglehold of debt and to check the moneylenders' powers of exploiting them. Other bills were enacted for providing better marketing facilities, establishing famine relief funds, and so forth. All in all, the agrarian legislation of the Congress Ministries, boldly conceived and swiftly carried through, was a notable achievement.

Another social reform was Prohibition. There was no such spontaneous popular demand for it as there was for agrarian reform, and it had not figured in the electoral manifesto; but most of the Congress leaders shared Mr. Gandhi's well-known desire to make India 'dry', and the Congress Ministries were instructed to

<sup>1</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 31 May 1939.

impose Prohibition throughout their Provinces within three years. This would involve so serious a loss of revenue from excise—about £2½ millions, for example, in Bombay—as to endanger the maintenance of the social services; and for that reason the project had been only partially applied when the Ministries resigned. Its full application had, however, been resolved on, and Ministers had made it clear that they expected to overcome the financial obstacle by getting help from the Centre despite the fact that Central funds were needed for Central purposes, especially defence. Mr. Gandhi himself was ready to force the issue. 'Deadlocks', he said, meaning presumably the concerted resignation of all the Ministries, 'may justifiably be created for such a noble cause.'<sup>1</sup>

Last but not least, a determined effort was made to grapple with the problem of primary education. Mr. Gandhi had long been interested in the technique of Basic Education which by associating a child's book-learning with one or more basic handicrafts has revolutionised the elementary stage of education in several Western countries; and an adaptation of it, known as the 'Wardha Scheme' or 'Mr. Gandhi's latest fad', was introduced in most of the Congress Provinces. This highly promising experiment (which has been continued since the Congress resignations) was carried furthest in the United Provinces and Bihar. At the same time a 'literacy' campaign was launched among the adult population. It evoked a warm response and was mainly sustained by unpaid volunteers; but it soon became clear that substantial results could only be achieved—and the same applied to Basic Education—by a considerable expenditure of public money, only obtainable by an increase in the burden of taxation.

Thus again the Congress Ministries were confronted with the perennial problem of ways and means; and it seems probable that, if they had stayed in office longer, they would have realised that they could not attain their social ideals without first raising the productive and taxable capacity of the population. As it was, they betrayed towards the end a tendency, shared by the non-Congress Ministries, to budget for a deficit. Otherwise, and apart from the issue raised by Prohibition, their financial policy was conservative and orthodox. Expenditure on the social services was increased on the average by 14 per cent., but this was usually met by retrenchment and new taxation. Schemes of development, such as electrical and irrigation works, were financed by loans.

Taken as a whole the record of its Ministries was one in which

<sup>1</sup> J. B. Kripalani, *The Latest Fad, Basic Education* (Wardha, 1939).



the Congress could take a reasonable pride. Its leaders had shown that they could act as well as talk, administer as well as agitate, and among them and their followers there was a genuine ardour for social reform. In the pursuit of it, indeed, the other side of the programme, the combating of the constitution, seemed to have been almost forgotten. But it had not been forgotten at the Congress 'Centre'; and the Congress Ministries, so stable in other respects, suffered from a sense of instability because at any moment the 'Centre' might decide to bring about the threatened 'deadlock'. That is what happened when, in the late autumn of 1939, on a constitutional issue which was primarily all-Indian and only indirectly Provincial, the Congress Ministries, after twenty-seven months of power, were ordered by the Working Committee to resign.

It was widely believed that several Ministers, anxious to carry on the work they had so well begun, obeyed their orders with reluctance; and it is certain that the resignations were profoundly regretted by the British Government. Its spokesmen had paid warm tributes to the 'distinguished record of public achievement' in all the Provinces and had contrasted the 'great constitutional success of Provincial autonomy in India' with the breakdown of constitutional government in other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> But it was not then fully realised that, though the new Provincial constitution had been worked effectively in the Congress Provinces, it had not been worked as its authors had intended. Its two main principles, Provincial autonomy and responsible parliamentary government, had both been violated by the unitarian policy of the Congress 'Centre'; and mainly for that reason the old disease of Indian politics had been so inflamed, the whole picture of Congress success had been so overshadowed, by the growth of communal antagonism that, when the Ministries resigned, it seemed as if in the Congress Provinces, without some drastic change in practice if not in law, the constitution would have soon become unworkable. In the end, as will be seen, it was a deadlock between the Hindus and the Moslems rather than between the Congress and the British Government that proved 'inevitable'.

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6121, p. 5: *Hansard*, H. of C., ccclii, 1635.

#### 4. THE NON-CONGRESS GOVERNMENTS

Since the reappointment of minority Ministries in the Congress Provinces was plainly impracticable, the Congress resignations brought about the application of Section 93 of the Act of 1935, which provided that, if the government of a Province could not be carried on in accordance with the Act, the Governor could assume all of the powers of government by proclamation. Thus the Congress Provinces became, in popular parlance, 'Governors' Provinces'. It was a clean throwback to autocracy: for the Governors, though they appointed Advisers, had no formal Executive Councils, and the Legislatures were suspended. But Section 93 had only been intended to meet a temporary emergency: the Proclamations could only remain in force for six months; and their periodical renewal since 1939 by Acts of Parliament has been due to the fact that the Congress, by continuing to refuse office, has perpetuated the emergency.

This has not meant, of course, the collapse of constitutional government in all British India. In the Punjab and Sind, and, except for one interval of seven months, in Assam, Provincial self-government has been in operation since 1937. In Bengal it operated till 1945. In Orissa, moreover, at the end of 1941 and in the N.W.F.P. in the spring of 1943, as the result partly of changes of opinion among members of the suspended Legislatures, the Congress lost control, the proclamations were revoked, non-Congress Ministries took office, and the Legislatures reassembled. Thus, at the beginning of this year (1945), six of the eleven Provinces, with an aggregate population of 115 millions, were under parliamentary responsible government.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from its greater length the political record of these Provinces has been similar in some respects to that of the Congress Provinces. A number of useful measures have been enacted. Agrarian reform has been tackled, though not so drastically. Finance has been even more conservative, since it has not been complicated by Prohibition which has only been tried on a very small scale. There have been rather less enthusiasm and advance in education, but there has been a greater proportionate increase in expenditure on the social services as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In the field of administration the maintenance of law and order has likewise been

<sup>1</sup> For recent developments in Bengal, Orissa and the N.W.F.P., see pp. 241-2 below.

<sup>2</sup> In 1939-40 the average increase over expenditure in 1936-7 in Bengal, the Punjab, Assam, and Sind was 17 per cent. In the estimates for 1942-3 it rose as high as 37 per cent.

the sternest test, and the gravest and most persistent threat to law and order, in the Punjab, Bengal and Sind<sup>1</sup> at any rate, has likewise been communal strife. During the period the Congress Ministries were in office, the total number of serious communal riots was 28, of casualties about 300, of deaths 36. This was a markedly better record than that of the Congress Provinces, but some of the outbreaks—in particular at Dacca in Bengal and Sukkur in Sind—were exceptionally bloody and destructive. Besides the usual rioting the Punjab Government had to deal with a highly dangerous agitation on the part of a militant Moslem organisation known as the Khaksars, and it has always had to face the possibility of trouble in the ranks of the restless and formidable Sikh community. In the Punjab and in Bengal—which has been more afflicted by industrial disputes and underground revolutionary activities than the other non-Congress Provinces—the Ministries have stood the test imposed on them: they have not been afraid to use their powers or to support their officials in the execution of their duty. In backward Assam and Sind Ministers have not shown the same capacity or firmness and have been more dependent on the senior civil services.

The main difference between the two groups of Provinces has been in the working of the constitutional machine. This has not arisen from the fact that the non-Congress Ministries accepted the new constitution while the Congress Ministries were pledged to combat it, since, as has been seen, that part of the Congress programme fell into the background. Nor have the relations between Ministers and Governors, if naturally somewhat more cordial in the non-Congress Provinces, been altogether different, since in all or almost all the Congress Provinces the Ministers were on good terms with their Governors and, when in the end they parted, parted as friends. In one non-Congress Province, indeed, in Sind, there were more serious and insuperable disputes than in any Congress Province; and they culminated in the Governor's dismissal of the Premier in the course of the disorders in the autumn of 1942.<sup>2</sup> It was not, then, on these points that the constitution

<sup>1</sup> Sind also had to cope with an exceptional outbreak, the revolt of the semi-civilised Hurs in 1942-3, which was too big an affair for the Provincial Government alone and necessitated the intervention of the Central Government and a military campaign.

<sup>2</sup> The Premier, Mr. Allah Baksh, whose sympathy with the Congress was unconcealed, publicly charged the British Government with responsibility for the 'rebellion' (see p. 223 below) and denounced its policy of repression. The Governor (Sir Hugh Dow) invited him to resign and on refusal dismissed him.

operated differently: it was first in the composition of the Ministries and secondly in their relations with their Legislatures and with political organisations outside them.

All the Congress Ministries were one-party Ministries: all the non-Congress Ministries have been Coalitions. This contrast sprang from the results of the elections. In all the Congress Provinces—for Bombay was practically no exception—the Congress secured safe majorities. In Bengal, Assam and Sind none of the many Parties which contested the elections obtained a clear majority, so that Coalitions were inevitable. And in the Punjab, though the Unionist Party won 96 seats in the Assembly out of 175, the Ministry it formed was a kind of intercommunal coalition; for, while the members of the Party were mostly Moslems, the Cabinet of six contained two Hindus and one Sikh.

Though the Punjab Ministry has had to face a more vigorous and competent Opposition than that which any of the Congress Ministries had to face, and also a mainly hostile press such as scarcely existed in the Congress Provinces, it has retained—at any rate till very recently—something like the internal solidity and external stability which its Congress neighbours enjoyed. But the other non-Congress Ministries have not been so fortunate. Again till very recently, they have not been closely united in themselves, nor sure of their footing in their Legislatures. There have been constant intrigues, shifting of votes, ministerial crises. Between 1937 and 1943 there were five changes of government in Sind. In Assam the variations, if not quite so rapid, were even less justified by any public interest. If Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq retained the Premiership of Bengal for more than five years, it was mainly due to the schisms in the Opposition ranks, and in the last stage it was only made possible by an uneasy alliance with some of his bitterest opponents. It seems clear, in fact, that so far neither Sind nor Assam—backward Provinces with relatively small populations, meagre financial resources, and a scarcity of qualified politicians—has proved itself capable of making a proper use of British parliamentary institutions. By the end of 1942, at any rate, no such sweeping judgement could have been passed on Bengal; but it was only in the Punjab that the new constitutional régime had been unquestionably successful.

Yet, if there were differences between the non-Congress Provinces in the way the Act of 1935 was worked, they all differed from the Congress Provinces on one cardinal point. The two basic principles of the new constitution, responsible government

and Provincial autonomy, were observed. The Ministries were responsible to their Legislatures and to no one else: they resigned when they lost their majorities therein and for no other reason. Thus, till in the course of 1942 Mr. Jinnah began his attempts to bring them under the control of the Moslem League,<sup>1</sup> they were free from such external interference by a super-Provincial organisation as that to which the Congress Ministries were subjected by the Congress 'Centre'. Thus the scope of ministerial responsibility was purely Provincial, and Provincial autonomy was therefore real autonomy. That did not mean that there was no external interference in Provincial politics. The Congress interfered. Mr. Gandhi personally intervened in the controversy about 'political prisoners' in Bengal. The agitation against the Sales Tax in the Punjab was backed and aided by the Congress 'Centre'. Mr. Allah Baksh's dispute with the Governor in Sind was mainly due to his relations with the Congress. Many other instances of interference could be cited, and all the time, of course, the Congress members of the Legislatures and the Provincial branches of the Congress as a whole were under 'Central' direction. This meant that the relations between Governments and Oppositions could not rest on a purely Provincial basis or be governed by purely Provincial interests. Conceivably, for example, the Punjab Coalition might have been strengthened by the inclusion of Congress representatives if Congressmen had not been forbidden by the 'Centre' to take part in Coalitions. But these intrusions and impositions from outside could only operate on the minorities. The majority Parties were free, and, freely supported by them, the non-Congress Ministries till the end of 1942 governed their Provinces in their own right. It was real responsible government because it was real Provincial autonomy.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 207 below.

## VII

# The Policy of the Congress

### I. THE CONSTITUTION

**M**EMBERSHIP of the Indian National Congress, also known as the 'Congress Party', is open to any person over 18 who pays an annual subscription of four annas ( $4\frac{1}{4}d.$ ) and declares in writing that he or she accepts the first article of the constitution, viz. 'The object of the Indian National Congress is the attainment of *Swaraj* by all legitimate and peaceful means'.<sup>1</sup> The number of these 'primary members', as they are called, has fluctuated. In 1938 they were reported to be  $4\frac{1}{2}$  millions, in 1941  $1\frac{1}{2}$  millions. But the political strength of the Party is not to be measured by these figures. Many Indians would vote for Congress candidates at an election without formally joining the Party—those whom Mr. Gandhi once described as 'the millions of un-registered Congressmen'. Since, moreover, it is more than a party, since it has been the chief vehicle of the Indian nationalist movement from its beginning some sixty years ago, the Congress appeals to the sentiment of many Indian patriots who disapprove its policy.

The primary members are grouped in twenty Provinces, some of which correspond with the Provinces of British India while others are smaller areas based on language. Each Province is divided into urban and rural constituencies which elect their delegates to the representative assembly or Session.

Owing to the war and to the intermittent conflict between the Congress and the Government, no Session has been held since 1940. Normally it meets once a year and is attended by upwards of 2,000 delegates. Its business, which usually takes about a week, is to lay down the general policy of the Congress by voting on resolutions submitted by the All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.). Though there is doubtless much discussion behind the scenes and the public debates are lively on occasion, the Session is more like a conference than a parliament. It is all one party. If it has its left and right wings, there is no regular 'Opposition'. On vital issues the A.I.C.C.'s resolutions are never rejected.

The Executive is not appointed at the Session. A few weeks before it is held, the delegates who have been elected in each Province meet as a separate Provincial group for three purposes.

<sup>1</sup> The constitution is printed in *Report*, Part II, Appendix I.

(1) They constitute themselves the Provincial Congress Committee, which is 'in charge of the affairs of the Congress' within the Province and can make rules, subject to the constitution, binding on all Congressmen therein. (2) They elect one-eighth of their number as their representatives on the A.I.C.C. (3) They record their votes on the candidate or candidates proposed for the Presidency of the Congress for the coming year.

The A.I.C.C., which consists of the Provincial representatives together with the President, the Treasurer, and all ex-Presidents and numbered 389 in 1942, is required by the constitution to 'carry out the programme of work laid down by the Congress from Session to Session and deal with all new matters that may arise during the term of office'; and it has a rule-making power like that of the Provincial Committees. But it meets at irregular intervals—sometimes several months—and the real executive power is not wielded by it but by its Working Committee. The fourteen persons who together with the President constitute this body were, till 1934, elected by the A.I.C.C.; but by an amendment of the constitution carried in that year they are now chosen by the President as soon as he takes office. For several years past most of the members of the Working Committee have been reappointed by successive Presidents. They are mainly veterans of the nationalist campaign. Since 1936 there have been only four new recruits.

The Working Committee's powers are very wide. It is defined in the constitution as '*the executive authority*'. It can 'frame rules and issue instructions for the proper working of the constitution and *in all matters not otherwise provided for*'. It is empowered 'to superintend, direct, and control *all* Congress Committees'. It can dismiss a Provincial Committee if it fails 'to function in terms of the constitution' and replace it with a body of its own choice. It may 'take such disciplinary action as it may deem fit against a committee or individual for misconduct, wilful neglect or default'. In the exercise of all these powers it 'shall remain responsible' to the A.I.C.C. and to the Congress in Session; but, naturally enough, it is the small body, not the big ones, that has dominated Congress politics. On all important questions the Working Committee takes the initiative, and its decisions are normally reaffirmed by the A.I.C.C. and approved, almost as a matter of course, at the next Session.

Since the President is elected by the whole body of Congressmen and nominates the members of the Working Committee, he might well seem to be the most powerful person in Congress politics.

Mr. S. C. Bose, indeed, when he was President in 1938, likened the office to that of the President of the United States who chooses his own cabinet. But in fact most of the Presidents have been local leaders with little prestige or influence beyond their own Provinces, and Mr. Bose was fated to learn that the master of the Congress was not its President but the person whom Pandit Nehru has called its 'permanent super-President'.<sup>1</sup> When he stood for a second term in 1939, Mr. Gandhi, who disapproved of his extremist policy, made known his opposition; and, when, notwithstanding, he was re-elected by a small majority, Mr. Gandhi threatened to withdraw from the Congress, obtained the backing of the A.I.C.C., forced Mr. Bose to resign, and secured the election of his own candidate in his place. Nor is the exercise of the 'super-Presidential' power exceptional or intermittent. Mr. Gandhi has always been consulted by the members of the Working Committee—most of whom are friends and comrades of old standing—and has frequently attended its meetings: on critical occasions he has taken the leading part in the public discussions of the A.I.C.C.; and the decisions of both Committees and of the Session likewise have usually accorded with his will. As far as is known, the Working Committee has only gone against his opinion three times in recent years, and, each of those times, it changed its mind and reverted to its old allegiance in the end. When, moreover, the Congress comes to an open rupture with the Government and launches a 'civil disobedience' campaign, Mr. Gandhi takes command of it. 'When we march as an army', he said in his closing address to the Session in 1940, 'we are no longer a democracy. As soldiers we have got to take orders from the General and obey him implicitly. His word must be law. I am your General.'<sup>2</sup> And he controlled the subsequent operations, naming the Congressmen who were to break the law and go to prison.<sup>3</sup> Similarly when 'open rebellion', as he called it, was declared in 1942,<sup>4</sup> the A.I.C.C. formally requested Mr. Gandhi 'to take the lead' and called on 'the people of India' to 'carry out his instructions'. In accepting his commission he described himself as 'the chief servant of the nation'.

Mr. Gandhi's supremacy is not unnatural. He has made the Congress what it is, for it was he who converted it from a movement of the intelligentsia into a movement of the people. If 'he dominates to some extent the Congress', Pandit Nehru has said, it is because he 'dominates the masses'. Mr. Gandhi has named the

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography*, pp. 132, 167, 194.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, i. 233. <sup>3</sup> See p. 205 below. <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*



Pandit as his 'legal heir'. 'I am sure when I pass', he said in 1942, 'he will take up all the work I do.'<sup>1</sup> But Mr. Gandhi's personality is unique, and no other Indian can hope to win the almost mystical devotion which the multitudes of Hindu country-folk accord to the Mahatma. Nevertheless, though there can never be another such 'super-President', the element of 'popular dictatorship' may well survive in Congress politics and indeed in Indian politics at large. The democratic spirit is a plant of slow growth, and, though the educated townspeople, especially the younger generation, may talk the language of the twentieth century, the great mass of the Indian people are no more democrats than their medieval ancestors. They are still steeped in the authoritarian tradition. Their instinctive conception of government is that of a ruler who gives orders and is obeyed.

## 2. CENTRALISATION

The Congress Party, it has been said, is 'the most powerful propagandist machine in Asia'. Its active influence radiates throughout British India, and it operates, though less directly and forcibly, on public opinion in the States as well. Almost all the Provinces are studded with its Committees, ranging in importance from those which represent the Provinces as a whole to those of a town ward or a village. The ubiquity and efficiency of its electoral agents were notably demonstrated in the elections of 1937. It possesses another powerful instrument of propaganda in the Hindu press—most of the leading Hindu newspapers are either controlled by the Congress or sympathetic with its policy—and it has its own official organs of publicity. Mr. Gandhi's famous weekly, *Harijan*, is his personal production; but, as has been seen, Mr. Gandhi's opinions are apt to be the opinions of the Congress; and before the war it was issuing from its Central and Provincial headquarters a steady stream of booklets and pamphlets which even the paper shortage did not entirely dry up. Committees and study-circles, moreover, were regularly organised for the discussion of political and social problems. All this has needed money, and money has not been wanting. The primary members' subscriptions form only a fraction of the revenue. The bulk of it, as Mr. Gandhi has said himself, is derived from the generous donations of wealthy Hindu industrialists.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Hindu*, 16 January 1941.

<sup>2</sup> L. Fischer, *A Week with Gandhi* (London, 1944), pp. 51-2.

The character of this great party will be misunderstood if it is regarded as only a party in the normal sense of the word. It is much more than that. Since 1920 it has been the vehicle of a revolutionary nationalist movement; and, while from time to time it has shared alongside other parties in the working of the existing constitution, it has, unlike those other parties, pledged itself to combat that constitution and destroy it. Nor is that all. As will be seen in the next section of this chapter, it has planned not only to bring the British Raj to an end but to take its place. To achieve those objects it has seemed essential that the movement should remain united. Most nationalist causes have suffered—some are grievously suffering to-day—from dissension in the patriots' ranks; and vast and varied India provides all too many opportunities for schism. For that very practical reason the political philosophy of the Congress is unitarian. Its own organisation, as has been seen, is highly centralised; and, till recently at any rate, its leaders held that in the constitution of the future free India the Centre should be made as strong as possible. The scheme, moreover, for drafting that constitution, which was expounded by the Working Committee in 1939 and adopted by the Session in 1940, is on a unitary basis. A Constituent Assembly is to be elected by adult suffrage throughout the country. It is to represent the 'nation' or the 'people' taken as a whole. The Provinces as such will have no voice; but the minorities can have separate electorates if they wish, and disagreements on minority rights can be referred to arbitration. Otherwise the provisions of the constitution will be decided by majority vote. This, it is asserted, is 'the only democratic method of determining the constitution of a free country'.<sup>1</sup>

One of the reasons why Pandit Nehru opposed the acceptance of office in the new Provincial Governments in 1937 was the threat which it involved to this unitarian creed. For the twin foundations of the new constitution were responsible government and Provincial autonomy. The Provinces were to be relieved from the 'superintendence, direction, and control' of the Centre in order that their Governments should be as fully and widely responsible as possible to their Provincial Legislatures and to the Provincial electorates behind them. And on this substructure of autonomous Provinces—together with autonomous States—the future Federation of all India was to rest. If, then, the Congress was to share in working this constitution, would it not be undermining the national unity of the movement just when it needed confirming

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii. 238; 1940, i. 229.

and consolidating for the final stage of its long campaign? Pandit Nehru made this danger clear in combating the 'astonishing and fatal suggestion' that the question of accepting office should be decided by the Congressmen of each Province concerned.

First issues will sink into the background, independence itself will fade away and the narrowest Provincialism raise its ugly head. Our policy must be uniform for the whole of India.<sup>1</sup>

In the event the Pandit's objection to taking office was overridden, but at any rate the policy was uniform. The decision was made by the Working Committee for all the Congress Provinces. And in the same method of unitary control lay the obvious safeguard against the risk that Congress Provincial Ministries and Congress majorities in the Legislatures might become too Provincial-minded, that their interest in promoting the social welfare of their Provinces might eclipse their interest in the emancipation of all Indian government from what remained of British control, that in working the constitution they might forget that they were pledged to combat it and end it. Any such tendencies were to be repressed by subjecting the Congress Governments and majorities to the control of the Congress 'Centre'. To that end Pandit Nehru gave a new interpretation to the principle of responsible government.

It is to the Congress as a whole that the electorate gave allegiance, and it is the Congress that is responsible to the electorate. The Ministers and the Congress Parties in the Legislatures are responsible to the Congress and only through it to the electorate.<sup>2</sup>

In pursuance of this doctrine, from the day they took office to the day they resigned, the Congress Ministries were firmly subjected to 'Central' control;<sup>3</sup> and the Congress members of the Legislatures were under the same 'high command', not only in the Congress Provinces but also in those in which they were a minority. This did not mean that the conduct of Congress politicians in any Province ran counter to the public opinion of their constituencies; but it did mean that their conduct was not determined by that public opinion but by the orders of the Congress 'Centre'.

The most notable example of this unorthodox method of working the constitution was afforded by the course of events in the Central Provinces. Dr. Khare's Ministry was the least stable and coherent of all the Congress Ministries, and in 1938 an unsavoury

<sup>1</sup> *Round Table*, No. 103, pp. 563-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Unity of India*, p. 82.

<sup>3</sup> Less firmly in the N.W.F.P. than in the other Congress Provinces: for the reasons, see *Report*, Part II, pp. 121-3.

scandal involving one of the Ministers precipitated a crisis. It was resolved by a change of Government, but Dr. Khare's removal was not brought about by a vote of no-confidence in the Legislature, still less by a general election. He was first formally condemned by the Working Committee, and then his successor was chosen by the Provincial Congress Committee at a meeting attended by the Congress President and other leaders from outside the Province.

This was not an exceptional case of 'Central' interference in Provincial concerns. On the contrary that interference was as regular and systematic as it was thoroughgoing. The Congress Ministers were subjected from the outset to the supervision of the Parliamentary sub-Committee of the Working Committee. Even the composition of his Cabinet was not a matter for a Premier's sole decision. And on all important questions the advice of the Working Committee was expected to be asked and to be taken. It is not suggested that, in itself and apart from the reactions it provoked, this 'Central' control was necessarily a bad thing. In some ways it strengthened the Congress Ministries: it ensured the disciplined support of their followers in the Legislatures: it repressed (as will be seen) the claims of non-ministerial Congress bodies to take a hand in government: it helped to adjust disputes and keep the Ministries on an even keel. But there was one aspect of it which impaired rather than enhanced the strength of Congress administration. As was pointed out in the preceding chapter, all the Congress Ministries suffered from a sense of insecurity. They could not look far ahead or make long-term plans of social progress. At any moment the Working Committee might decide that the time had come for the Congress to engage in another round of open conflict with the Government. The issue would probably be one which concerned all India and not the Provinces directly; but the inevitable first step in a campaign of 'non-co-operation', to be reinforced perhaps by 'civil disobedience', would be the resignation of the Congress Provincial Ministries. That is what happened in 1939. It is believed that some of the Premiers obeyed the Working Committee's orders with reluctance, but they did obey them. This was a final proof of the extent to which the decentralising purpose of the new constitution had been reversed. The Congress Provinces had been subjected to a 'superintendence, direction and control' by the Congress 'Centre' at least as rigorous as that which the official Central Government had once exercised.

### 3. CONGRESS RAJ

For many years past the Congress has claimed to be the only authoritative organ of Indian nationalism; and certainly it is not only far the oldest and largest nationalist organisation in India but the only one that is 'national'. The other Parties, though nationalist in that they desire the freedom of India, are not national but communal Parties. The Moslem League, for example, consists, as its name shows, of Moslems only, and the Hindu Mahasabha of Hindus only. In the Congress alone are all the communities represented. While the great majority of its members are Hindus, there are also many Moslems, Sikhs, Christians and so forth. Since 1940 the President has been a Moslem, Maulana Azad, and in 1942 three other members of the Working Committee were Moslems. Hence, as Mr. Gandhi declared at the Round Table Conference, the Congress claims to represent all India.<sup>1</sup> But it has gone further than that. It has claimed to be fully and validly representative of all India—of the minorities as well as the majority. It has identified itself with the 'nation'. It has spoken in its resolutions on behalf of 'the people of India'.

On these assumptions it was logical enough for the Congress to regard itself as entitled to the heritage of the British Raj. 'The power to mould our country's destiny is not ours yet,' wrote Pandit Nehru in 1937: 'there is no *Swaraj*, no Congress Raj.'<sup>2</sup> In 1940 Mr. Gandhi declared that the Congress was the 'one democratic elected political organisation' in India, and that, while it should try to win the confidence of other parties it need not come to an agreement with them, but should by itself 'develop sufficient strength to take delivery' from the British Government.<sup>3</sup> Again in 1942 Mr. Gandhi spoke of 'real power being handed over to the Congress'.<sup>4</sup> And he seems to have taken it for granted that this would mean the transference to the Congress not only of the control of British India but also of the suzerainty over Indian India. In 1938 he advised the Rulers of the States to 'cultivate friendly relations with an organisation which bids fair in the future, not very distant, to replace the Paramount Power'.<sup>5</sup> It is true that other parties were to have a voice in moulding India's destiny. They were to be represented in the Constituent Assembly, and in 1942 Mr. Gandhi affirmed that the 'real power' he wanted was not

<sup>1</sup> See p. 139 above.

<sup>2</sup> *Unity of India* (London, 1941), p. 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Harijan*, 15 June 1940.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 December 1938: citing with evident agreement a statement of Maulana Azad.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 3 December 1938.

for the Congress only but for all.<sup>1</sup> But it seemed clear that the Congress was to play the dominant role in organising the provisional National Government which he was proposing to set up; and, when the time came for convoking the Constituent Assembly, the Congress' incomparable electoral organisation could be counted on to secure it a majority.

With such plans in mind the Congress constituted itself an *imperium in imperio*, a sort of State within the State. Like other nationalist organisations in the past—Sinn Fein in Ireland, for example—it established a 'parallel' system of government side by side with the official or legal system. As described earlier in this chapter, it has had its own deliberative and executive institutions, both Central and Provincial. During one of its 'civil disobedience' campaigns it set up its own courts in some districts. It has long flown its own tricolour flag, and in *Bande Mataram*, a Hindu patriotic song first sung in Bengal, it possesses a kind of 'national anthem'. Thus, when the new Provincial constitution came into force in 1937, a Congress Government of a sort was already in existence, with its own political organisation and its own patriotic symbolism, prepared to 'take delivery', if not yet at the Centre, at any rate in the Provincial field. The upshot was a curious dualism. In law the Governments of the Congress Provinces were linked with that of British India as a whole and thus associated with its official Centre. But they were also and at the same time incorporated in the 'parallel' Congress system and associated much more closely with the Congress 'Centre'.

It was not only the Working Committee's control of the Congress Ministries that showed that a 'Congress Raj' had been established in their Provinces. It was betrayed by the conduct and bearing of Congressmen, both in the performance of public duties and as individuals, at the outset of the new régime. *Bande Mataram* was sung to open proceedings in the Provincial Legislatures. The tricolour was hoisted over local administrative buildings. And, not unnaturally, all the subordinate branches of the 'parallel' Government now felt themselves authorised to govern. Congress Committees issued orders. In some districts Congress police stations were opened and Congress police began to investigate crime. More disquieting to those who remembered the part played by para-military formations in Europe, the United Provinces Provincial Committee set up a 'Military Department' and declared its intention of raising a Provincial force 500,000 strong to be brigaded

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 2 August 1942. See p. 221 below.

with other Provincial forces in a great 'National Army'. An officers' training camp was started, and bodies of men began drill and march, in uniform, with *lathis*<sup>1</sup> for arms, and their flag flying. A less sinister phenomenon, but one which made a deep impression on the minorities, was the demeanour of the rank and file of Congressmen, especially the younger ones, on the morrow of their electoral victory. Many of them behaved as if they were a ruling caste, as if they owned the country.<sup>2</sup>

These tendencies were checked as time went on. It was clearly as illogical as it was embarrassing that Congress Committees should maintain a 'parallel' Government when the Government it 'paralleled' was now in Congress hands; and resolutions were passed by the Working Committee bidding committees and individuals not to interfere with the regular administration. Unofficial police activities were similarly discouraged. Mr. Gandhi himself combated the military movement by appealing for the enrolment of a 'peace army', pledged to deal with disorder by non-violent methods. There was little response, but the agitation for a 'national' force gradually died down. Meanwhile, since the Moslem members of the Legislatures walked out when *Bande Mataram* was sung, the Working Committee had ordered it to be curtailed, and eventually it was dropped altogether. Since the flag, similarly, provoked the flying of other party flags, it was hauled down. But the harm had been done. All the people of the Congress Provinces who were not Congressmen—and they numbered many millions—had been quick to observe the Congress' disclosure of what can only be called a totalitarian mentality. That word has an ugly sound, and Congress methods, it need hardly be said, are not those of Axis barbarism. Other parties are not suppressed. Opinion is free. Opposition within the Congress ranks to the will of its 'high command' is disciplined indeed, but at the worst by no more than expulsion from the party. The conduct of the Congress can no more be likened to that of the Nazi and Fascist parties than the character of Mr. Gandhi can be

<sup>1</sup> Long weighted sticks.

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to compare what happened in China when the Kuomintang set up a system of one-party government in 1928. 'As soon as it gained power it lost much of its popularity. This was largely due to the conduct of the local branches—the Tang Pu—which fell into the hands of young and irresponsible politicians. The theory that the Kuomintang controlled the Government, as interpreted by these foolish young men, led to irritating interference with local administration as well as much tyranny and injustice for which no redress could be obtained.' (Sir John T. Pratt *War and Politics in China*, London, 1943, p. 254.)

likened to that of the Axis dictators. But the essence of totalitarianism is not in its methods but in its principle, and its principle is simply one-party government or the identification of the Party with the State. When the Congress Governments took office, this identification did in fact come about. It was manifest not only in the symbolism—the flag and the ‘national anthem’—nor only in the pretensions of committees or individual members of the party to be part of the Government machine, but also in the Governments’ allegiance to the Congress ‘Centre’. Ministers did not regard themselves as servants of the Crown—to use the terminology of the British parliamentary system—but as servants of the Congress. Nor was this attitude comparable with that of the leaders of a party in a Western democracy who, having won an election and formed a Government, maintain their loyalty to the party and accept, maybe, the control of its ‘caucus’. For they know that their power is a temporary trust and that sooner or later the leaders of another party will take their place. But in the Congress Provinces in 1937, so omnipotent was the electoral machine, so overwhelming the triumph at the polls, that the Congress control in most, if not quite all of them, seemed assured for an almost indefinite time to come. Hence the checks on a party dictatorship which operate in Western democracies—the uncertain issue of the next election, the desire to conciliate hostile and win over neutral elements of public opinion, the need for compromise with minority views, in sum, the substitution, as far as practicable, of government by discussion for government by the sheer weight of a majority—all those checks were absent. The minority parties did not count; they were not consulted; their opposition was firmly voted down. It was impossible, in fact, to evade the truth that the idea of a ‘Congress Raj’ had materialised. The Congress had ‘taken delivery’ in most of the Provinces. It intended soon, no doubt, to take it at the Centre.

#### 4. INTERVENTION IN THE STATES

In seeking to extend the Congress Raj from the Congress Provinces to the Centre the Congress leaders were confronted by the same two main difficulties which had beset the earlier efforts of British and Indian statesmen to build up a just and stable settlement out of the shifting complex of Indian politics—the problem of the minorities and the problem of the States. A Congress Raj in British India implied the acquiescence of the minorities, and



this was unobtainable as long as most of the minority leaders, especially the Moslems, rejected the claim of the Congress to represent all Indian nationalists. A Congress Raj over the whole of India implied the acquiescence of the Princes, and this was likewise unobtainable as long as they retained their autocratic powers. These were formidable obstacles, but in the first flush of their electoral triumph the Congress leaders seem to have believed that they could both be carried by a vigorous frontal attack.

In the case of the States this involved a sharp reversal of policy. While the Congress had consistently maintained since 1929 that Indian India should be brought into line with British India by the introduction of responsible government, it had abstained from direct intervention. But in the autumn of 1937 a new note was struck. Disturbances in Mysore, one of the most advanced states, provoked the A.I.C.C. to pass a resolution condemning the State Government's 'ruthless policy of repression' and calling on the people throughout India 'to give all support and encouragement' to the people of Mysore in their fight for self-determination.<sup>1</sup> A resolution passed by the Session in the following February took wider ground. *Swaraj*, it declared, must be that of all India. It must all remain united, in liberty as in subjection, and it must all enjoy 'the same measure of democratic freedom'. While the Congress as an organisation, the resolution went on, could still afford only 'moral support and sympathy' to its comrades in the States, individual Congressmen would be free 'to render further assistance in their personal capacities'.<sup>2</sup>

The immediate upshot was an outbreak of serious disorder in Mysore which led to a concordat between the State Government and the Congress 'Centre'. The Government agreed that the 'Mysore State Congress' should be officially recognised and take part in the discussion of constitutional reform. The Working Committee, for its part, was content to express the hope that responsible government would soon be introduced.

This 'partial success', said Mr. Gandhi, inspired 'a new vision of liberty' in other States;<sup>3</sup> and during the summer and autumn of 1938 the agitation for constitutional advance spread fast through Indian India. In several States there were more or less violent outbreaks, and a number of Rulers were induced to concede at least a measure of the demands presented to them. At the end of the year Mr. Gandhi fanned the flame. He acclaimed the

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1937, ii. 361-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1938, i. 299-300.

<sup>3</sup> *Harjan*, 17 September 1938.

awakening of the States' peoples and declared that there was no half-way house between the total extinction of the Rulers and their acceptance of full responsible government. It was on this occasion that he warned them (as recorded above) that the Congress was likely before long 'to replace the Paramount Power'.<sup>1</sup> Early in 1939 this firm language was echoed in more strident tones by Pandit Nehru as President of the All-India States' People's Conference. Stagnation and decay, he said, were imposed on the States by British imperialism. The Congress would never recognise the treaty-system, nor tolerate British intervention to uphold it. Responsible government in the States was an inevitable part of 'the larger freedom of India now in sight'. 'The time approaches when the final solution has to come—the Constituent Assembly of all the Indian people framing the constitution of a free and democratic India.'<sup>2</sup>

Meantime individual Congressmen were at work in some of the States, promoting 'civil disobedience'; and in March Mr. Gandhi himself made a dramatic demonstration in Rajkot.<sup>3</sup> More alarming were the disturbances in the leading states of Hyderabad, Kashmir and Travancore; and in the two former the trouble was aggravated by communal strife. Their rulers, Pandit Nehru caustically remarked, were 'apt pupils of British imperialism' and had learnt the art of utilising communal differences to check popular movements.<sup>4</sup> But in the circumstances communal antagonism required no artificial stimulus in Hyderabad, where the Nizam and the ruling class are Moslems while 85 per cent. of the people are Hindus, or in Kashmir, where the Maharaja and the ruling class are Hindus and 76 per cent. of the people Moslems. As long as the rulers were autocrats, no section of their subjects could dispute their will. That is the chief reason why the record of the States as a whole in the matter of communal strife had hitherto been so markedly better than that of British India. But now that a sub-

<sup>1</sup> *Harjan*, 3 December 1938.

<sup>2</sup> *The Unity of India*, pp. 27-46.

<sup>3</sup> The Ruler was accused of breaking an agreement he had made with the Congress about the personnel of a committee for framing a scheme of constitutional reform. Mr. Gandhi demanded that five out of the nine members of the committee, including the chairman, should be Congressmen chosen by himself, and on refusal began a 'fast unto death'. At the same time he invited the intervention of the Paramount Power, and, when the Governor-General suggested and the Ruler agreed that the Chief Justice of India should be asked to interpret the agreement, he broke his fast. The interpretation accorded with the Congress' claim, but Mr. Gandhi renounced the award. A moderate reform scheme was ultimately published.

<sup>4</sup> *Unity of India*, p. 41.

stantial agitation was afoot for Indian India to share in the political advance of British India, the communal reaction in the one was inevitably the same as in the other. The same struggle for the power wielded by the old régime had begun. And in Hyderabad and Kashmir it was bound to be particularly bitter since in those States responsible government would mean nothing less than a political and social revolution.

The intensification of communal feeling was doubtless one of the reasons—the difficulty of ensuring that the agitation should be ‘non-violent’ may well have been another—which induced Mr. Gandhi to restrain the more militant of his colleagues and call a halt. He expressed regret for his own conduct in Rajkot. He advised the abandonment of ‘civil disobedience’ in Travancore. He recommended reformers in the States at large to moderate their immediate demands with a view to hastening the ultimate attainment of their goal. As usual, Mr. Gandhi’s wishes prevailed. Except in Hyderabad, where Hindu agitation, not under Congress auspices, continued a few months longer, the storm at once died down.

The campaign had not been ineffective. The rulers of several States had yielded ground. Qualified responsible government was established in the little State of Aundh, and dyarchy in Cochin and Rajkot. Representative institutions were enlarged in Mysore and some of the Rajput States. Some unofficial Ministers were appointed in Baroda. In Kashmir a majority of the assembly was now to be elected, in Hyderabad almost a majority. There were developments also in local self-government and in the introduction of advisory committees. In the aggregate the progress achieved was by no means negligible. If the States as a whole were still far behind the Provinces of British India, at least they had begun to advance along the same road. But there was another side to the picture. The campaign had stiffened the disinclination of the Princes to concede any of their treaty rights for the purposes of Federation, and it had made it unmistakably clear that in the States, as in the rest of India, a peaceful constitutional settlement was impossible without a general intercommunal agreement between the Hindus and the Moslems.

## 5. THE COERCION OF THE LEAGUE

The minority question in India has always been primarily a question of the relations between the Moslems and the Hindus.

The Scheduled Castes contain no less than 50 million people—about half the number of the Moslem community—but the strength of their moral position is not reflected in their organisation and resources. They are too weak to contest successfully the Congress claim to represent them. Except in Bombay, their spokesmen in the Legislatures elected in 1937 were mostly either Congressmen or under Congress influence. The six million Sikhs constitute a formidable but primarily a local problem, a problem of the Punjab rather than of India as a whole. It is the Moslems, now numbering about 100 millions, who have always been the major crux. But in 1937 the political organisation of the community was still relatively backward. True, the great majority of the Moslem seats at the elections were won by non-Congress Moslems; but they were candidates of various local parties: there was no common Moslem front. The League was the strongest party in the Hindu-majority Provinces; but it was still mainly composed of upper-class politicians, its membership was relatively small, it had little contact with the Moslem masses; and in the Moslem-majority Provinces its position was even weaker. It was little known on the Frontier. In the Punjab it was overshadowed by the Unionist Party. Neither in Bengal nor in Sind had it won a majority of Moslem votes. Nevertheless its mere existence invalidated the Congress claim to speak for all Indian Moslems who desired the freedom of India.

In this situation two choices were open to the Congress leaders after their victory at the polls. One was to take the League into partnership, to constitute Congress-League Coalition Ministries in the Congress-majority Provinces. This is what Mr. Jinnah had plainly suggested before the elections,<sup>1</sup> and what was definitely expected in the U.P., where the League was strongest. To politicians schooled in the British parliamentary tradition this choice might well have seemed attractive: the morrow of a victory, it might have been thought, was the time for compromise and conciliation. But the Congress leaders took the other path. They decided not to come to terms with the League but to override it and try to absorb it. This was not because, as their critics said, they were 'drunk with victory'. There were substantial arguments in favour of a militant and uncompromising policy. In the first place Coalition Governments, even though the Congress might be the predominant partner, were not the 'Congress Raj' on which so many Congressmen had set their hearts. They would prohibit unitary control from the Congress 'Centre' both in the campaign

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 152-3 above.

for eliminating the British Raj and in the execution of the concerted programme of social reform. In both fields the Congress, it seemed, would be stronger if it stood alone. Secondly, the Congress had always denied the validity of communalism in politics. It held that those two great causes, the liberation of India and the uplift of the masses, were not affected by differences of religion. If the League leaders were sincere in their support of them, why should they not join the Congress and work for them within its ranks? Why, on the other hand, should the Congress, with an overwhelming majority in the Legislatures, hamper itself by an alliance with so small, so weak, and, in its opinion, so reactionary a body as the League, merely because it was Moslem?

Such, it is safe to assume, were the main reasons why the Congress leaders, in that fateful summer of 1937, decided to reject the League's advances and to seek to get rid of its opposition not by partnership, but by absorption. And they looked, no doubt, beyond the Hindu-majority Provinces in which their power seemed unassailable whatever the minorities might do. It was in those Provinces that the League was strongest. Its collapse there would mean its collapse everywhere. Already one of the four Moslem-majority Provinces had become a 'Congress Province'. The mass of Moslems in the N.W.F.P., though not formally members of the Congress, had identified themselves with its policy. Their Premier was a Congressman, soon to become a member of the Working Committee. And, if the peculiar situation in the N.W.F.P. could not be reproduced in the Punjab or Bengal or Sind, the Congress minorities in all those Provinces were active and influential; and, once the League, which, whatever its weakness, was the only party capable of organising a common Moslem opposition throughout India, was out of the way, the local Moslem leaders might be expected to come to terms, to accept the safeguards offered by the Congress, and to acquiesce in its claim that its electoral predominance in British India taken as a whole should be reflected in due course at the Centre.

With these arguments and purposes in mind the Congress leaders put into operation a twofold policy. First, the leaders of the League in the U.P.—and the decision made there applied to the other 'Congress Provinces'—were plainly told that there would be no Coalition. One or two of them might become Ministers, but only if they became Congressmen. The League group in the Legislature must 'cease to function as a separate group': it must be merged in the Congress Party: and its members must accept the

majority decisions of the Party like any other members.<sup>1</sup> Since the Congress seemed assured of an electoral majority in most, if not all, of these Provinces for an indefinite time to come, the choice thus presented to the League leaders was hard. They must either dissolve the League and be absorbed in an organisation which, though non-communal in principle, was overwhelmingly Hindu in personnel, or lose all chance of office in their Provincial Government for as long ahead as they could see.

Secondly, the Congress leaders launched what was known as a 'mass-contact' movement among the scattered Moslem country-folk. They were told that the Congress victory implied no threat to their religion; for the Congress was non-communal and had repeatedly pledged itself to safeguard the rights of all communities.<sup>2</sup> The real issue was not communal but economic, and the Congress, not the League, was the champion of the poor and had put in hand a drastic policy of agrarian reform which would benefit Moslem peasants equally with Hindu. Let them, therefore, strengthen the hands of the Congress in its task of social uplift by joining those many Moslems who had been members of the Party since its birth.

In contrast with the campaign in the States this attempt to coerce the League was an unqualified failure. The Moslem reaction to it must be described in a separate chapter, for it marks an historic turning-point in the course of Indian politics.

<sup>1</sup> Document 3, p. 294 below.

<sup>2</sup> A resolution of the Working Committee, passed in October 1937 and adopted by the A.I.C.C., renewed the Congress' undertaking to ensure the minorities' 'participation in the fullest measure in the political, economic, and cultural life of the nation'. *Indian National Congress, 1936-7* (Allahabad, 1938), pp. 71-2.

## VIII

# The Moslem Reaction

### I. THE WIDENING OF THE GULF

THE leaders of the Moslem League rejected the Congress ultimatum. They chose to stay in the political wilderness, with no hope of sharing in the prestige and emoluments and opportunities of public service which could only be obtained by absorption in the Congress. Mr. Jinnah's personal reaction was especially significant. He had never acquired the reputation of an intransigent communalist. On the contrary he had once been spoken of in Congress circles as 'the ambassador of Hindu-Moslem unity',<sup>1</sup> and a passage in Pandit Nehru's autobiography describes him as 'largely responsible in the past for bringing the Moslem League nearer to the Congress'.<sup>2</sup> That this was still his policy in 1937 was implicit in the League's electoral manifesto. Thus the rejection of its offer of co-operation was a direct rebuff to him, and he sharply retaliated. So far from acquiescing in the Congress' claim to represent them, 'the Moslems', he declared, 'can expect neither justice nor fair play under Congress government'.<sup>3</sup> And it was soon clear that he was not speaking only for himself or only for the Moslems in the Congress Provinces. Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab, advised the Moslem members of his Unionist Party to join the League, and similar declarations of support were made by Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq, Premier of Bengal, and Sir Muhammad Saadullah, Premier of Assam. The League had thus suddenly acquired a prestige among Moslems throughout India such as it had never enjoyed before; and Mr. Jinnah, who was to be re-elected as its President in each successive year, had no less suddenly acquired a new personal authority. Always in the forefront of Indian politics, he had hitherto failed to command the confidence of his community as a whole. He had been a sectional rather than a communal leader, an outspoken anti-British nationalist, who had seemed to conservative-minded Moslems too 'Congress-minded' to be regarded as a whole-hearted champion of Islam. But now he was no longer only one of several leaders. Hailed by vociferous Moslem crowds as the personification of the

<sup>1</sup> *Jawaharlal Nehru, an Autobiography* (London, 1938), p. 67.   <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1937, ii. 143.

communal pride and pugnacity awakened by Congress policy, he was fast becoming *the* leader.

In the face of these developments it was difficult for Congressmen to go on saying that the League did not count and that the bulk of Moslem opinion was really on the Congress side. And soon there was still clearer proof that these pretensions were untenable. At its outset the 'mass-contact' movement seemed to be going well: numbers of countryfolk were enrolled in the Congress ranks; one or two by-elections to Moslem seats were won by Moslem Congressmen. But before long the tide began to turn. The village *mullahs* told their flocks that to say that politics had nothing to do with religion was blasphemy; and the League politicians, warned by the Congress' example, began to extend their party organisation to the countryside and seek contact with the Moslem masses. The results were soon apparent in the record of by-elections. All over India a swing to the League set in which has continued ever since. Between the general elections of 1937 and the summer of 1943<sup>1</sup> there were 61 by-elections to Moslem seats in the Provincial Legislatures, filled by separate Moslem electorates. Of these, the League (reckoning Moslem voters for the Punjab Unionist Party in this period as also voters for the League) won 47, independent Moslems 10, Congress Moslems 4. Of the 14 by-elections to the Central Legislature between 1934 and 1943 the League won 7 and the Congress 2.<sup>2</sup>

The growing power of the League seems to have bred in Mr. Jinnah's mind something akin to the intransigence of the Congress leaders in 1937. Though many Moslems were Congressmen and though there were one or two independent Moslem organisations which repudiated the League's policy, he insisted that the League should be recognised as the only body qualified to represent the Moslem community. Such a claim was no more acceptable to the Congress than the Congress claim had been acceptable to Mr. Jinnah; and in the light of it a somewhat half-hearted attempt to

<sup>1</sup> The returns from the Punjab and the Central Provinces are up to July 1942.

<sup>2</sup> The persuasive influence of Congress propaganda on some publicists in the United States is illustrated by the following passage in Miss Kate Mitchell's *India, an American View*, an English edition, published in 1943, of a book published in America in 1942. 'The record of the League shows that it has never represented more than a fraction of the Moslem community. . . . Nor is there evidence that the League has substantially increased its following since the adoption of its "Pakistan" programme in 1940' (p. 27). The evidence of the by-elections is surely decisive, and inquiry in India would have provided it. For later figures see p. 242 below.



discuss the possibility of a Congress-League agreement inevitably broke down. All through 1938 the gulf steadily widened. If the language of the Congress leaders was restrained, Mr. Jinnah's grew more bitter. At the League Session at the end of the year—the most crowded and enthusiastic that had yet been held—he declared that all hope of communal peace had been wrecked 'on the rocks of Congress Fascism'.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the next twelve months the temperature of the dispute was raised still higher by the publication of two documents, known as the *Pirpur* and *Shareef Reports*, and a third which was the personal production of Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq, purporting to describe the grievances of the Moslems in most of the Congress Provinces. The first was moderate in tone, but it firmly asserted that Moslems could not hope for justice unless their true leaders shared in the administration. 'The Muslims think that no tyranny can be as great as the tyranny of the majority.'<sup>2</sup> The other two were more violent. They consisted mainly of lists of 'atrocities' alleged to have been committed by Hindus on Moslems. In the *Shareef Report* assaults were described in such repulsive detail as was bound to make any Moslem reader of it 'see red'. That there was some truth in the charges is undeniable: for the political quarrel had inevitably embittered communal relations and revived old-standing communal disputes throughout the country; and it was only to be expected that Hindu villagers would be tempted to take a higher hand with their Moslem neighbours now that the Government to which they would have to answer for it was no longer, as Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq remarked, a 'non-partisan Government'.<sup>3</sup> But that did not mean that the Congress Ministries had lent themselves to a policy of communal injustice, still less of deliberate persecution. Such a gross violation of the principles that their leaders had so long preached and the promises they had so often made was inconceivable, nor, of course, could the Moslem members of the Ministries have acquiesced in it. The official rebuttal of the League's charges might be regarded as partisan, but it was broadly confirmed by neutral observers. The Governor of the U.P., for example, after his retirement at the end of 1939, recorded his opinion that 'in dealing with communal issues' Ministers had 'normally acted with impartiality and a desire to do what

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, ii. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Inquiry Committee appointed by the All-India Muslim League to inquire into Muslim Grievances in Congress Provinces* (Lucknow, 1938), p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *Muslim Sufferings under Congress Rule* (Calcutta, 1939), p. 2.

was fair'.<sup>1</sup> But such an impartial judgement was not to be expected among the Moslem masses. The publicity given to the reports confirmed the belief of the Moslems in the 'Congress Provinces' that they were doomed to the fate of underdogs, and sent a wave of angry sympathy running beyond their borders.

Among the educated Moslems, it may safely be said, the so-called 'atrocities' were not the main reason for their recoil from the Congress Raj. They rejected its claim to be super-communal; they regarded it as tantamount to a Hindu Raj; but they can hardly have supposed that it directly or immediately threatened the maintenance of their religious rights and customs. More disquieting was the prospect that Hindu political power would mean the strengthening of the stranglehold of Hindu business men, from the big capitalist to the little moneylender, on Moslem economic life. And behind that lay something still more menacing, if more impalpable. Though many of its members might be genuinely non-communal, the mentality of the Congress was essentially Hindu. It was largely inspired by Mr. Gandhi, who, though a sympathetic student of many religions, was confessedly devoted to the old traditions of Hinduism. Thus all Congress policy seemed in Moslem eyes to be threaded with Hindu ideas or tendencies. Ironically enough, it was one of the best features of the Congress régime, its active interest in popular education, which excited most suspicion. It was not only Mr. Gandhi's notorious enthusiasm for the teaching of basic handicrafts: Hindu schoolmasters in many schools required their pupils, whatever their faith, to accord a ceremonial, almost a religious reverence to the Mahatma. Some of the text-books, too, seemed to glorify Hinduism at the expense of Islam. Were not Moslem children being insensibly and insidiously indoctrinated with Hindu ways of thought? And the prospects in higher education seemed equally alarming. Moslem backwardness in this field was undeniable. Would the balance ever be redressed if political power was a permanent Hindu monopoly?

Another disquieting fact was that, while the numerical strength of the Congress was now falling, that of the Hindu Mahasabha was rising. For the Mahasabha, founded a decade earlier as a purely cultural organisation, had now become primarily political, and under its fiery President, Mr. V. D. Savarkar,<sup>2</sup> was preaching an uncompromising doctrine of Hindu ascendancy. The Congress was fiercely attacked just because it professed to be non-communal

<sup>1</sup> Sir Harry Haig, *Asiatic Review*, July 1940, p. 428.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 96 above.

and to pursue a non-communal policy. In fact, said Mr. Savarkar, it was a Hindu body; its Moslem members were mere 'figureheads'; its attempts to compromise with Islam were a betrayal of the Hindu cause. The only way to deal with the Hindu-Moslem schism was to insist that all India was Hindustan and that the Moslems must reconcile themselves to the status of a minority community in a democratic state which orders its life by majority rule. To safeguard this position universal military training should be introduced and the personnel of the Indian Army adjusted to the communal proportions of the population as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

This exacerbation of the communal conflict could not be confined to the politicians. It was reflected in the vernacular newspapers. It excited the workers in the towns and created an atmosphere of suspense and alarm throughout the countryside. And inevitably the tension came to a head in a new outbreak of rioting and bloodshed. In the two years from October 1937, there were 85 serious riots, about 2,000 casualties and 170 deaths in British India. Such a record was unhappily no novelty, but there was a new feature in this recrudescence of communal strife. It seemed to be less spontaneous, more deliberate, more persistent than before. Indian observers agreed with British officials that Hindu-Moslem relations had never in their experience been so bad. By the end of 1939 it was widely believed that, if the Congress Governments had lasted much longer, communal fighting would have broken out on an unprecedented scale. The idea of a 'civil war' had been an almost inconceivable idea as long as British rule was still unquestioned, but now many Indians were saying it was coming.

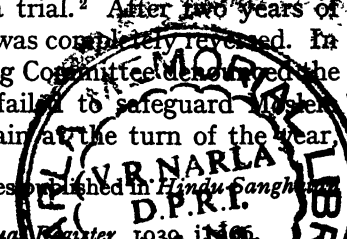
## 2. SEPARATISM

The widening of the communal gulf was inevitably reflected in the Moslem attitude on constitutional issues. It will be remembered that, as late as the spring of 1937, in Mr. Jinnah's opinion—and that was soon to mean the League's opinion—the Provincial part of the Act of 1935 was worth a trial.<sup>2</sup> After two years of Congress government this judgement was completely reversed. In the spring of 1939 the League Working Committee denounced the new constitution as having utterly failed to safeguard Moslem rights.<sup>3</sup> A few months later, and again at the turn of the year,

<sup>1</sup> See Mr. Savarkar's presidential addresses published in *Hindu Sangh* (Bombay, 1940).

<sup>2</sup> See p. 153 above.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, i, 106.



Mr. Jinnah repudiated the principles on which it had been framed. A democratic system of parliamentary government, he said, based on the concept of a homogeneous nation and the method of counting heads, was impossible in India.<sup>1</sup> When the Congress Ministries resigned, Mr. Jinnah declared that they must never come back, and the observance of 'a day of deliverance and thanksgiving' was organised by the League throughout the country.<sup>2</sup>

No less drastic was the transformation of Mr. Jinnah's ideas about the Centre. It will be remembered again that in 1937 he was still a champion of Federation and that his chief quarrel with the Federal part of the Act of 1935 was that it did not provide enough responsible government.<sup>3</sup> But now the prospect of responsible government at the Centre was even more intolerable than in the Provinces since it would be exercised over all India, over Moslem-majority as well as Hindu-majority Provinces; and it was clear that the Congress leaders aimed at creating at the Centre something like the 'Congress Raj' they had created in their Provinces. What could prevent it? Not minority 'safeguards', nor separate electorates. In Moslem eyes the former had proved useless; and it was now evident that the latter were of small avail as long as they were concerned with the composition of the legislature only and not of the executive as well. Reliance on the inevitability of Coalition Governments had proved no less misguided, and the Congress agitation in the States seemed to show that the idea of their acting as a neutral and balancing element at the Centre was also likely to be falsified: for either they would stay out of the Federation or would enter it in more democratic guise and under Congress influence.<sup>4</sup> For these reasons the Federal scheme of 1935 was now entirely repudiated by the League. So was the Congress plan for framing a home-made constitution to take its place. The Constituent Assembly, said Mr. Jinnah in 1939, would be nothing but 'a packed body, manœuvred and managed by a Congress caucus'.<sup>5</sup>

So far the League's policy was merely negative; but from the autumn of 1938 onwards a new and positive doctrine was taking shape in Moslem minds. It countered the logic of democracy with the logic of nationalism. If Indian Moslems were no more than a 'community' within one Indian nation, then, since they numbered

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India*, 7 August 1939; *Time and Tide*, 19 January 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 7 December 1939.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 150 above.

<sup>4</sup> League Executive Council Resolution, 1938, *Indian Annual Register*, 1938, ii. 345.

<sup>5</sup> *News Chronicle*, 11 December 1939.

only about one-quarter of the total population, they could scarcely expect to obtain an equal status with the Hindu community which numbered about three-fifths. But the Moslems, it was now asserted, were not a 'community': they were a 'nation'; and nations are entitled to stand on an equal footing with each other in international society whatever their respective size may be, and to exercise an equal right of self-determination. Nor was this claim to nationhood purely cultural. Like other nations, the Indian Moslems, it was pointed out, possessed their own national homeland in those areas in north-west and north-east India in which they were in a majority. The first step, then, in securing Moslem rights should be the consolidation of those areas into a coherent Moslem State or States by the federation of their component Provinces with such adjustments of their frontiers as might seem advisable.

This idea of territorial consolidation was not new. It was broached by the famous Moslem poet, Sir Muhammad Iqbal, when he was President of the League in 1930. In the course of his address to the Session, he said:

It is clear that, in view of India's infinite variety in climates, races, languages, creeds, and social systems, the creation of autonomous States based on unity of language, race, history, religion, and identity of economic interests is the only possible way to secure a stable constitutional structure in India.<sup>1</sup>

One such State, he suggested, should be created by the amalgamation of the Punjab, the N.W.F.P., Sind, and Baluchistan. But by 'autonomous States' he did not mean independent sovereign States. He contemplated a loose federation of all India, 'the Central Federal Government only exercising those powers which are expressly vested in it by the free consent of the Federal States'.

This scheme was in sharp conflict with the unitarian doctrine of Hindu politicians, and it was accordingly rejected by the Nehru Committee<sup>2</sup> to whom it had been communicated in 1928. But it remained at the back of Moslem minds, particularly in the Punjab, Iqbal's native Province; and in 1939 it reappeared in a more detailed and comprehensive form in a pamphlet circulated by Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Premier of the Punjab from 1937 till his premature death at the end of 1942. He suggested the grouping of all the Provinces and States in seven Regions. Two of these would cover the Moslem-majority areas in north-west and north-east

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1930, ii. 334.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 127 above.

India: in the rest the Hindus would predominate. The Regions would be federal, the Provinces and States retaining their autonomy and continuing to exercise most of their existing powers. But the Regional Legislatures would deal with subjects of common interest to the component units at their request, and they would take over some of the subjects entrusted to the Centre by the Act of 1935 and would share with the Centre in the control of some other subjects.

Sir Sikander's treatment of the Centre is a striking illustration of the extent to which the prospect of a Congress Raj had undermined the conception of Indian unity. He stood in the front rank of Indian statesmen. That the Punjab was the only Province in which the parliamentary system had been a real success was mainly his doing and mainly due to his wholehearted policy of inter-communal co-operation. He was well aware that India needs a strong Central Government; but, unlike most Hindu doctrinaires, he had realised that, at this stage of India's political evolution, Provincial patriotism was safer ground to build on than the still nascent consciousness of Indian nationhood and had warmly supported the principle of Provincial autonomy as embodied in the Act of 1935. But now he believed that the Moslems—so greatly had their fear of a Hindu Raj been quickened—would no longer acquiesce in a Federation of the normal type. He proposed, therefore, first that the field of Central authority should be reduced to the barest minimum—foreign affairs, defence, tariffs, currency—and, secondly, that the Centre should be what he called an 'Agency Centre', acting not in its own right as a national all-India Government but as agent for the Regions and their component units, which had entrusted some of their common concerns to its charge.<sup>1</sup> This was a new constitutional idea. Regionalism so conceived lies between a normal Federation and a mere Confederacy or League.

The weakness of the Punjab plan, as it may fairly be called, was that the demarcation of the Regions seems to have been governed by political convenience rather than economic interests and that the communal 'balance' it established at the Centre—five Hindu Regions to two Moslem—was even more uneven than the existing Provincial 'balance' of seven to four. However 'minimal' the scope of the Centre's authority, would the Moslems in their present mood tolerate its exercise by so great a Hindu majority? Would they tolerate *any* Hindu majority in *any* Centre? In other

<sup>1</sup> *Outlines of a Scheme of Indian Federation* (1939) and *Official Report of the Punjab Legislative Assembly*, vol. xvi, No. 8 (11 March 1941).

words, was any form of federal union, however tenuous, now practicable, or must the knot be cut by sheer Partition?

Partition was first advocated by a group of young Moslems in England at the time of the Round Table Conference. Led by Mr. C. Rahmat Ali, they founded what became known as the 'Pakistan National Movement' and demanded that the Punjab, the N.W.F. or Afghan Province, Kashmir, Sind, and Baluchistan should be federated into a separate sovereign State.<sup>1</sup> This proposal attracted little notice at the time. When the spokesman of the League was asked about it at the Joint Select Committee in 1933, 'As far as I know', he answered, 'it is only a students' scheme.' It was brushed aside by another member of the delegation as 'chimerical and impracticable'.<sup>2</sup> And nothing more was heard of the movement till in 1940 Mr. C. Rahmat Ali published a second edition of its creed. Pakistan, he now declared, was not enough. Bengal (plus Assam) and Hyderabad must also constitute sovereign States, linked in a triple alliance with Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

Meantime the official attitude of the League was still in doubt. In March 1939 the Working Committee appointed a sub-committee with Mr. Jinnah in the chair, to examine such constitutional schemes as had been or might be propounded, but little was known of its labours as the year drew on. In September the Working Committee declared that Moslem India was 'irrevocably opposed' to any 'federal objective'.<sup>4</sup> In January 1940, an English journal published an article by Mr. Jinnah in which he summed up his case in the following words: 'There are in India two nations who both must share the governance of their common motherland.'<sup>5</sup> Sharing is not separation, and Mr. Jinnah had not yet crossed the line. But in March the League Session at Lahore, attended, it was reckoned, by as many as 100,000 members, passed a resolution declaring that the Moslem-majority Regions must be grouped 'to constitute independent States' and authorising the Working Committee to frame a constitutional plan 'providing for the assumption finally by the respective Regions of all powers such as defence, external affairs, communications, customs, and such other matters as may be necessary'.<sup>6</sup> Clearly that meant clean Partition. The Moslem reaction had gone as far as it could go.

<sup>1</sup> 'Pakistan', derived from the letters marked in the text, means 'Land of the Pure'.

<sup>2</sup> *Minutes of Evidence*, Q. 9598-9.

<sup>3</sup> *The Millat of Islam*, &c., by C. Rahmat Ali (16 Montague Road, Cambridge).

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii. 351.

<sup>5</sup> *Time and Tide*, 19 January 1940.

<sup>6</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, i. 312.

Two comments seem permissible. In the first place the doubts so persistently expressed by British statesmen in the past as to the possibility of successfully transplanting the British system of parliamentary government in India had been justified. The 'faith' of 1919 had so far proved illusory. The communal schism was still too deep to allow the operation of simple majority rule. In the second place, though British criticism of the Congress is bound to be regarded by Congressmen as biased because the Congress has been the most vigorous opponent of British rule, British sympathisers with the cause of Indian nationalism can do it no service by evading the plain fact that, whatever faults the other parties concerned may have committed, the chief reason why the domestic political situation in India had deteriorated by 1940 to a point which would have seemed almost inconceivable a few years earlier was the manifest purpose of the Congress to take over the heritage of the British Raj. And, if that be so, it seems legitimate to ask whether the main body of Indian nationalists might not have done better if they had followed the Liberals along Mr. Gokhale's path of co-operation with Britain rather than taken Mr. Gandhi's path of non-co-operation and revolt. If they had made the most of the Acts of 1919 and 1935, trusting in the last resort to the liberal tradition of the British people and their growing desire that India should become a full free partner in the Commonwealth, might they not have been nearer to their goal to-day?



## IX

# War and Deadlock

### I. THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

**I**F the hesitation of the Princes had somehow been overcome and if the Congress leaders had somehow been induced to give the Act of 1935 a trial at the Centre as well as in the Provinces, a 'National Government' would have been in office in the autumn of 1939. Though the Congress would presumably have obtained most of the seats in the Legislature allotted to British India, the inclusion of the representatives of the States and of the minority parties would have necessitated a Coalition Government whose members would have been responsible to the Legislature for the control (subject only to the 'safeguards') of all the great Central departments except Foreign Affairs and Defence. In that 'reserved' field the Governor-General would still have been responsible to the Secretary of State and Parliament; but it may be taken for granted that, as the danger of war approached, he would have consulted his Ministers; and when war came, so great was the revulsion against Nazism of Indian public opinion as a whole, it seems at least possible that he might have secured their backing and that of their supporters in the Legislature in proclaiming war with Germany.

In view of the course of events about to be described and particularly, perhaps, of Mr. Gandhi's pacifism, such possibilities may never have been probabilities, and it is profitless in any case to dwell on 'might-have-beens'. As it was, the pre-1935 constitution was still in force at the Centre in 1939; the Governor-General (Lord Linlithgow) had no responsible Ministers to consult, and his proclamation that 'war has broken out between His Majesty and Germany' was not associated with any democratic procedure. In all the partner States of the British Commonwealth, except Eire, the declaration of war was approved by Ministers responsible to their own Parliaments. But, if the contrast was obvious enough, it could be overstated. To say, as Congress spokesmen have often said, that India was 'dragged' into the war against the will, or at least without the consent, of the Indian people is not true of all of them. Statements were made in both houses of the Central Legislature on the morrow of the proclamation, and Lord Linlithgow later addressed them in joint session. On each occasion

there was no intimation of dissent from the confident assertion that India would play her full part in the war. At the same time a Defence of India Bill, equipping the Central Government with emergency powers for the conduct of the war, was introduced and, after full debate and some amendments, carried in both houses without a division.<sup>1</sup> Only the Congress members were absent, obeying the orders which, as will be seen, the Working Committee had issued a few weeks earlier.<sup>2</sup> Nor was this by any means the only manifestation of Indian public opinion assenting to India's participation in the war. The Premiers of Bengal, the Punjab and Sind, backed by majorities in their Legislatures which represented in the aggregate over 90 million people, pledged their Provinces to the war effort. Most of the political parties took the same line. The executive of the National Liberal Federation, for example, while asking for a policy of political appeasement, declared that this was 'not a time for bargaining' and that India should unhesitatingly and unconditionally support the democratic Powers.<sup>3</sup> The Mahasabha Working Committee similarly denounced 'the spirit of bargaining' and affirmed that India must co-operate with Britain in defence.<sup>4</sup> As for Indian India, the Princes individually assured the Governor-General of their full support on the outbreak of the war, and at the next meeting of their Chamber a unanimous resolution was passed promising the British Government all possible aid in men, money and material 'for upholding the cause of justice and maintaining the sacredness of treaties'.<sup>5</sup> But the chorus was not complete. The voices of the two parties which mattered most were missing.

Congress foreign policy had long been mainly shaped by Pandit Nehru who has had much wider personal contact with the outside world than any of his fellow leaders. The speech he made in 1936 on the gathering clouds in Europe and the chance a war would give the Congress of achieving its aims has been quoted in an earlier chapter.<sup>6</sup> During the next three years he was an outspoken critic of the British policy of 'appeasement', and at the Session in

<sup>1</sup> *Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. v, nos. 4, 7, 13. *Council of State Debates*, vol. ii, no. 6.

<sup>2</sup> The Congress Nationalists, a small group associated with the Hindu Mahasabha and independent, at the time, of control by the Congress 'Centre', attended the debates and mustered eight or nine votes in support of their amendments.

<sup>3</sup> *Times of India*, 11 September 1939.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii. 344.

<sup>5</sup> *Proceedings of the Chamber of Princes*, 11-12 March 1940, pp. 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> See pp. 151-2 above.

March 1939 he moved a resolution which described it as 'a deliberate betrayal of democracy'. India, it was declared, must keep aloof from both Imperialism and Fascism and pursue her own independent policy of peace and freedom.<sup>1</sup> A few weeks later a small contingent of Indian troops was sent to strengthen the garrison at Aden—a precautionary measure which was denounced by the A.I.C.C. as implying that the troops were meant to be employed 'for British imperialist purposes'. 'The Congress', ran its resolution, 'is determined to oppose all attempts to impose a war on India and use Indian resources in a war without the consent of the Indian people.'<sup>2</sup> When the Working Committee met in August, more troops had been sent overseas, to Egypt and Singapore. This action, said the Committee, had been taken 'against the declared will of the Indian people' and 'might lead to India's entanglement in a war'. As a first step 'to give effect to the Congress policy', the Congress members of the Central Legislative Assembly were bidden to absent themselves from its next session, and the Provincial Congress Ministries were warned 'to assist in no way the preparations of the British Government'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, some weeks before Hitler sprang on Poland, the Congress leaders had taken the line of non-co-operation with the British Government.

On the outbreak of war Lord Linlithgow at once asked Mr. Gandhi to come and see him. In the brief account of the interview which Mr. Gandhi published in *Harijan*, he said that he had told Lord Linlithgow that his 'own sympathies were with England and France from the purely humanitarian standpoint' and that, when he envisaged the possible destruction of the Houses of Parliament and Westminster Abbey, he 'broke down'. But he had explained that he could not speak for the Congress or for any one but himself. 'With my irrepressible and out-and-out non-violence I knew that I could not represent the national mind'.<sup>4</sup> In the same issue of *Harijan* Mr. Gandhi printed the text of a letter he had written to Hitler on July 22. 'You are to-day', he had told him, 'the one person in the world who can prevent a war which may reduce humanity to the savage state', and he had begged him to 'listen to the appeal of one who has deliberately shunned the method of war not without considerable success'. The same pacifism dictated his opinion as to the attitude which the Congress should take up. 'Whatever support was to be given to the

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, i. 342. <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 351. <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 214.

<sup>4</sup> *Harijan*, 9 September 1939.

British', he held, 'should be given unconditionally.' But it could only be 'moral support', since 'the Congress is a non-violent body'.<sup>1</sup>

On September 15 the Working Committee declared its policy in a lengthy resolution drafted by Pandit Nehru. The gist of its argument was that 'the issue of peace and war must be decided by the Indian people', that any co-operation 'must be between equals by mutual consent for a cause which both consider worthy', and that, while wholly on the side of freedom, India cannot fight for it unless she herself is free. The British Government was invited, therefore, to state 'in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged'. 'Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?'<sup>2</sup> On October 10 a resolution of the A.I.C.C., while renewing the request for a definition of war aims, called also for immediate action. 'India must be declared an independent nation, and present application must be given to this status to the largest possible extent.'<sup>3</sup>

If the Congress was making demands, so was the League. On September 18 its Working Committee followed the Congress lead in denouncing Nazi aggression and declaring its sympathy with the cause of the democracies; but it warned the British Government that it could count on solid Moslem support only on two conditions. Moslems must be given 'justice and fair play' in the Congress Provinces, and no assurances must be given as to constitutional advance, nor any new constitution framed, 'without the consent and approval' of the League, 'the only organisation that can speak on behalf of Muslim India'.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile Lord Linlithgow was sounding opinion among all the leading politicians. He interviewed over fifty persons, including Mr. Jinnah and other Moslems, and Pandit Nehru and other Congressmen. On October 17 he issued a public statement. As to war aims, he repeated the British Prime Minister's declaration that Britain sought no material advantage for herself, but desired the establishment of a better international system and a real and lasting peace. As to the freedom of India, he renewed the pledge that Dominion Status, a status of complete equality in self-government

<sup>1</sup> *Harjan*, 23 September and 4 November 1939.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii, 226-8.   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>4</sup> *Cmd.* 6121, pp. 17-19.

with Britain, was the goal of British policy in India.<sup>1</sup> To that end the Act of 1935 would be reconsidered after the war 'in the light of Indian views' and with due regard for the opinions of the minorities. As to immediate action he proposed the establishment of an advisory council, representing all India, to associate Indian public opinion with the prosecution of the war.<sup>2</sup>

If this statement seems an over-cautious response to the emotional appeal of Indian patriotism, it must be remembered how fast and far the communal schism had been widening during the last two years and how gravely a further increase of tension might affect the conduct of the war. It might impair the solidarity of the Indian Army. It might set a current of fanaticism moving along the strategic routes of the Middle East. In view of all that was at stake it is hard to quarrel with Lord Linlithgow's plea that 'there is nothing to be gained by phrases' and that 'the situation must be faced in terms of world politics and of practical realities in this country'. And it was the most awkward of those realities, the communal schism, which obstructed the immediate constitutional advance which the Congress had demanded. A basic change would have required such intensive and prolonged discussion in Parliament and outside it as to seem barely conceivable in the middle of a war, and even a less substantial change could not have been made at that time with the agreement of the chief parties concerned. It afterwards appeared that Lord Linlithgow had been authorised to discuss with the politicians the possibility of making the Central Executive Council more like a 'National Government' for British India by the appointment to it of party leaders; but he had found that an agreed choice of such leaders was impossible without a prior agreement as to the composition of the Provincial Ministries; and on this old question of coalition versus one-party government there seemed no chance of compromise. But all such difficulties in meeting their demand for an immediate constitutional advance were brushed aside by the Congress leaders. They rejected Lord Linlithgow's statement out of hand. It 'shows clearly', said Mr. Gandhi, 'that there is to be no democracy in India if Britain can prevent it';<sup>3</sup> and on October 22 the Working Committee gave notice that the Congress, so far from supporting

<sup>1</sup> Since the essence of Dominion Status is complete equality between all the nations of the British Commonwealth, there cannot be an inferior grade of it: but to prevent such a misinterpretation Lord Linlithgow later on defined the objective in India as 'Dominion Status of the Statute of Westminster variety'. *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, i. 373-5.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 6121, pp. 3-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Harijan*, 21 October 1939.

the British Government, was now in open conflict with it. As a first move the Committee 'calls upon the Congress Ministries to tender their resignations'—which they did. The 'programme of resistance', the resolution continued, 'requires perfect discipline within the Congress ranks'.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Gandhi stated later that the control of any 'civil disobedience' movement that might be launched had been entrusted to him.<sup>2</sup>

The League's attitude was less definite. In its resolution of October 22 the Working Committee did not accept the Governor-General's statement as a basis for its co-operation in the war effort; but it did not reject it: it asked for 'further discussion'. One point in the statement it attacked. The federal scheme of 1935 should not be reconsidered: it should be scrapped and an entirely new constitution devised. Another point, which according to the Congress resolution had been raised merely as a screen for British imperialism, was expressly commended by the League—the stress laid on minority opinion.<sup>3</sup>

In November Lord Linlithgow made one more effort to bring about a settlement. He interviewed Mr. Gandhi, Mr. Jinnah and Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the Congress President for 1939-40, and 'begged them in the most earnest manner' to come to terms on the issue of the Provincial Ministries as a prelude to co-operation at the Centre. It was no use. The Congress leaders declined 'to consider any steps to further co-operation unless the policy of the British Government is made clear on the lines suggested by the Congress', and insisted that the communal question could only be settled by a Constituent Assembly according to the Congress plan. Such an attitude on the part of the Congress leaders, said Mr. Jinnah, precluded any discussion between them and him.<sup>4</sup>

So the deadlock was created which has lasted ever since. Neither the Congress nor the League was willing to support the war effort except on contradictory terms. But there was an important practical difference in the position of the two great parties then and thereafter. No Congressman associated himself with the official conduct of the war: non-co-operation was complete. The League 'high command', on the other hand, while not committing the League to co-operation as an organisation, acquiesced in its members continuing to hold office in Provincial Governments fully engaged in the war effort and in their co-operating as individuals in many other ways.

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii. 237-9.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1939, ii. 352.

<sup>2</sup> *Harijan*, 28 October 1939.

<sup>4</sup> Cmd. 6129, pp. 5-11.

## 2. REACTION TO THE BLITZKRIEG

Till the summer of 1940 there was no change in the Indian situation except a stiffening of the deadlock. The war in Europe seemed far away, and it was taken for granted that, as in the previous war, India would be shielded by British sea-power from becoming a field of battle. But this sense of security was shattered by the *blitzkrieg*. When France fell, it was generally believed that Britain would soon share her fate, and there seemed nothing to prevent the Germans from occupying Egypt and descending thence, as Napoleon had once planned, on India. That such a prospect was not mere 'alarmism' was shown by the passing of an Act of the British Parliament conferring extra powers on the Governor-General 'in the event of a complete breakdown of communications with the United Kingdom'. The peril in which Britain itself plainly stood seemed to have reminded Indian patriots of the part she had played in history in the defence of freedom. The tone of Congress hostility softened. 'We do not seek our independence', said Mr. Gandhi, 'out of Britain's ruin.'<sup>1</sup> But this did not mean a change of policy. 'While India is completely opposed to the idea of the triumph of Nazism', said Pandit Nehru, 'it is no good asking her to come to the rescue of a tottering imperialism', and, 'though England's difficulty is not India's opportunity', she could not suspend her own fight for freedom.<sup>2</sup> Nor, of course, had the catastrophe in Europe tempered Mr. Gandhi's pacifism. He naturally regarded it as an opportunity to uphold the doctrine of non-violence against the barbarism of war.

On June 18 he wrote in praise of Pétain's armistice. 'I think French statesmen have shown rare courage in bowing to the inevitable and refusing to be a party to senseless mutual slaughter';<sup>3</sup> and on July 3, when a German attack on Britain seemed imminent, he sent a message to the British War Cabinet begging them and 'every Briton' to adopt 'a nobler and a braver way' of fighting and to let Hitler and Mussolini 'take possession of your beautiful island if they wish'.<sup>4</sup> At the same time he warned Congressmen to resist the temptation to resume office in the Congress Provinces and accept membership of the Central Executive Council. To aid the war effort, to set their hands to the 'war

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 1 June 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 12 and 25 May 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *Harijan*, 18 June 1940.

<sup>4</sup> This appeal was published in *Harijan*, 6 July 1940. The British Government replied expressing their appreciation of Mr. Gandhi's motives but declaring their intention of prosecuting the war to a victorious conclusion.

machine', would be 'a disaster of the first magnitude'. 'If, on the other hand, the Congress sticks to its colours, it is sure to fight its way to its goal even before the war is over, provided the fight is purely, truly, and demonstrably non-violent.'<sup>1</sup>

But the Working Committee was for once unwilling to follow the Mahatma's lead. To a majority of its members, including Pandit Nehru and Mr. Rajagopalachari, it seemed unwise to commit the Congress to such thorough-going pacifism 'in the period of transition and dynamic change' which now seemed at hand. The Committee, said its resolution of June 21, 'are unable to go the full length with Gandhi; but they recognise that he should be free to pursue his great ideal in his own way and therefore absolve him from responsibility for the programme and activity which the Congress has to pursue'.<sup>2</sup> The first part of this programme was the organisation of defence and public security throughout the country, not in co-operation with the Government, but through Congress committees and individuals—a reversion to the technique of 'parallelism'.<sup>3</sup> The second part of the programme, embodied in a resolution of July 7, went further. It contemplated co-operation on terms. The demand for an immediate declaration of the 'full independence of India' was renewed, and, to give effect to it, the formation of a 'provisional National Government' at the Centre was proposed, so constituted as to command the confidence of all the elected elements in the Central Legislature and secure the closest co-operation of responsible Governments in the Provinces. On these conditions the Congress was prepared 'to throw its full weight' into organising the defence of India.<sup>4</sup>

It has been said that in not accepting these proposals the British Government missed its last chance of bringing all India into a united war effort. The 'activists' had beaten the pacifists in the Working Committee. Mr. Gandhi had been dropped. Was not this the moment to strengthen the hands of men like Pandit Nehru and Mr. Rajagopalachari who unquestionably wanted to fight the Germans? No certain answer can be given to such questions. The declaration of independence could only, of course, have been prospective, nor could the National Government have been wholly responsible to the Legislature without such a basic constitutional change as, on the British side at any rate, was regarded as impracticable during the war. But would the Congress leaders have been satisfied with that? The old dispute, moreover, as to

<sup>1</sup> *Harizan*, 6 July 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, ii. 175.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 174-5 above.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, ii. 176-7.



the communal composition of such a Government would still have needed settling. As to that Mr. Jinnah, who had recently proclaimed the 'two-nation' doctrine and hoisted the banner of Pakistan, now told Lord Linlithgow that, if the Central Council were enlarged and the Congress joined it, the Moslems must have as many seats as the Hindus. Would the Congress leaders have agreed? And, lastly, did the Congress offer full co-operation in the war if its terms were granted? Mr. Rajagopalachari and Maulana Azad, the new President, had no doubt about that,<sup>1</sup> but Pandit Nehru's attitude was more guarded. 'We have made it perfectly clear in the past', he said, 'that we cannot help the war effort of British imperialism or become its recruiting sergeants. That position continues completely unchanged, but to maintain our own independence, for our defence and the defence of freedom, we are prepared under our own direction to do our best.'<sup>2</sup> Did that mean that India's part in the war was no longer to be directed by the British 'high command'?

Meantime the British Government had been considering a new move on its own account. It was a new Government, for the *blitzkrieg* had made Mr. Churchill Prime Minister and brought Mr. Amery to the India Office. It was remembered that Mr. Churchill had headed the little band of Tory 'die-hards' who had regarded the Act of 1935 as conceding more self-government than India was yet fit to exercise and had tenaciously combated its passage. But it was also remembered that Mr. Amery had been one of Mr. Churchill's most persistent antagonists in those debates. It was remembered, too, that he had taken a leading part in the final evolution of the British Commonwealth into a partnership of free and equal nations, and he was credited with the ambition of crowning his political career by presiding over India's attainment of the same Dominion Status. Soon after taking office he declared once again that this was the objective of British policy and that the future form of Indian self-government was a matter for Indian discussion, not British dictation. This point was reaffirmed in the new statement issued by Lord Linlithgow on the British Government's behalf on August 8. The new constitution, it said, should be 'primarily the responsibility of Indians themselves and should originate from Indian conceptions of the social, economic, and political structure of Indian life'—an echo of Mill's doctrine after eighty years.<sup>3</sup> This was a virtual abandonment of the right to

<sup>1</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 13 July 1940.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 July 1940.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 76 above.

control the constitutional advance of India which Parliament had exercised at every previous stage, since it made it practically impossible for Parliament to repudiate a constitution on which Indians were agreed. But there were two provisos. First, British obligations must be fulfilled—an allusion to such matters as defence, minority rights, and the treaties with the States, which will be discussed in a later chapter.<sup>1</sup> Secondly, minority opinion must not be overridden.

It goes without saying that they [the British Government] could not contemplate the transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a Government.

Constitutional issues, the statement continued, could not be decided at 'a moment when the Commonwealth is engaged in a struggle for existence'—it was the eve of the Battle of Britain—but after the war a representative Indian constitution-making body would be set up and Indian proposals as to its form and operation would at any time be welcome. Meanwhile the decision to enlarge the Central Executive Council and to establish an Advisory War Council would be brought into effect, and it was hoped that all parties and communities would co-operate in India's war effort and thus pave the way for her attainment of free and equal partnership in the British Commonwealth.<sup>2</sup>

The reaction of the Congress to this 'August Offer', as it was afterwards called, was swift and violent. President Azad refused Lord Linlithgow's invitation to discuss it.<sup>3</sup> 'It widens the gulf', said Mr. Gandhi, 'between India *as represented by the Congress* and England.'<sup>4</sup> The whole conception of Dominion Status for India, observed Pandit Nehru, was 'as dead as a doornail'.<sup>5</sup> The most pernicious feature of the statement, it was said, was its treatment of the minority problem. That issue, said the Working Committee's resolution of August 22, 'has been made into an insuperable barrier to India's progress'.<sup>6</sup>

The reaction of the League was naturally different. The statement was interpreted as a welcome proof that the fears so often

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 275–285 below.

<sup>2</sup> Cmd. 6291.

<sup>3</sup> *Indian National Register*, 1940, ii. 201.

<sup>4</sup> *News Chronicle*, 14 August 1940. Italics not in the original.

<sup>5</sup> *Hindustan Times*, 12 August 1940.

<sup>6</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1940, ii. 196–8.

expressed by Moslem spokesmen—and those of other minorities too—lest the British Government should be induced by Congress agitation to impose a Congress Raj on India were unfounded. The statement meant, said the Working Committee's resolution, that 'no future constitution, interim or final' would be adopted without the League's assent. At the same time the idea of a united India implicit in the statement was repudiated. 'The partition of India is the only solution.' The League's co-operation in the conduct of the war would be governed by the same 'two-nations' doctrine: the 'fifty-fifty' principle must be applied.<sup>1</sup>

Thus the only result of the British Government's move had been, it seemed, to harden the Hindu-Moslem schism; and that, said the Congress leaders, had been its deliberate intention. It was 'a direct encouragement and incitement to civil discord and strife'.<sup>2</sup> Against such a fierce impeachment of the sincerity of Mr. Amery and his colleagues may be set two statements he made about this time. The Congress, he said, in explaining the 'August Offer' to the House of Commons, was 'by far the most efficient political machine in India'.

Inspired by an ardent national patriotism, they have striven to make that organisation national and all-embracing. If only they had succeeded, if Congress could in fact speak, as it professes to speak, for all the main elements in India's national life, then, however advanced their demands, our problem might have been very different and in many respects far easier than it is to-day.<sup>3</sup>

Again, in a speech at the end of the year, he appealed to the Indian public to adopt the watchword 'India First'. It might, he said, inspire the Congress to seek a compromise with the Moslems and the Princes—inspire the Moslems not to press their defence of their communal rights to the point of disrupting India—inspire the Princes to bring their system of government into closer harmony with the rest of India's political life. Above all, 'India First' meant the preservation of that unity which had been Britain's greatest gift. Partition, as Mr. Amery pointed out in a later speech, could not solve the minority problem. 'It is a counsel of despair and, I believe, of wholly unnecessary despair.'<sup>4</sup>

This attitude evoked no response in India. Mr. Amery was formally reprimanded by the League Working Committee for

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 243-5.

<sup>2</sup> Working Committee resolution of 22 August, cited above.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, H. of C., ccclxiv. 872.

<sup>4</sup> *India's Freedom* (London, 1942), pp. 35-6, 87.

'indulging in such slogans' as 'India First'. Mr. Gandhi was provoked into an unusually bitter attack in the course of which he propounded a policy which was to constitute in the coming years the cardinal issue of dispute between the Congress on the one hand and the British Government and the minorities on the other. This policy has been described by its critics as 'putting the cart before the horse'. British abdication was to precede a communal settlement. The 'unbridgeable gulf between the Congress and the Muslim League' was a 'domestic' question. Let the British 'withdraw from India', and then all parties would come together and devise a constitution. 'It may be that, before we come to that happy state of affairs, we may have to fight amongst ourselves. But, if we agree not to invite the assistance of any outside Power, the trouble will last perhaps a fortnight.'<sup>1</sup>

This is one of the most puzzling of Mr. Gandhi's pronouncements. Could he suppose that it was practical politics for the British Government to withdraw until an Indian Government had been formed to take over its authority? Or that British public opinion would acquiesce in an abdication which might, he admitted, immediately result in civil war? And how could he square his 'out-and-out non-violence' with the belief that a just and lasting settlement of the communal problem could be achieved by force, however brief its exercise?

### 3. SATYAGRAHA

The reaction of the Congress leaders to the 'August Offer' threw them back to Mr. Gandhi and the policy of non-co-operation. In mid-September the A.I.C.C., while commending the British nation's courage in adversity and declaring that nothing must be done to embarrass it, insisted that the Congress must be conceded 'the fullest freedom to pursue its policy'. What this meant was explained by Mr. Gandhi. 'I claim the liberty of going through the streets of Bombay and saying that I shall have nothing to do with this war.' Independence was no longer the immediate issue. 'Our demand is for freedom of speech.' If this were rejected, the 'next step', a campaign of non-violent 'civil disobedience' (*satyagraha*), would be 'inevitable'.<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Gandhi sought an interview with Lord Linlithgow who explained to him how conscientious objectors to war were treated in Britain. Mr. Gandhi was not content with that. He must be

<sup>1</sup> *Indran Annual Register*, 1941, i. 327.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1940, ii. 212-17.

free, he said, 'to call upon the people throughout the country to refrain from assisting India's war effort'.<sup>1</sup> Lord Linlithgow refused this demand; and on October 13—the Battle of Britain was then at its height—the Working Committee accepted Mr. Gandhi's plan of campaign and promised him 'the fullest co-operation in all that he may require or expect them to do'.<sup>2</sup>

The campaign was launched in four stages. First a few individual Congressmen, selected by Mr. Gandhi, were instructed publicly to shout the slogan, 'It is wrong to help the British war effort with men or money: the only worthy effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance'. The shouters were promptly arrested and condemned to a few months' simple imprisonment. Pandit Nehru, it was said, had been chosen to be one of them; but, having recently made some violent speeches in the U.P. against the Government, he had been convicted on a charge of sedition and severely sentenced to four years' imprisonment.

The second stage, which was started in mid-November, was described by Mr. Gandhi as 'representative *satyagraha*'. The *satyagrahis* were now chosen from groups such as the Working Committee, the A.I.C.C., and the members of the Central and Provincial Legislatures. Many eminent Congress politicians appeared in the streets, uttered the slogan, and were arrested and sent to prison, mostly for twelve months. By the end of the year between five and six hundred *satyagrahis* had been convicted. In December President Azad, who had been making speeches similar to Pandit Nehru's, was sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment.

Early in the new year the third stage opened—demonstrations by larger numbers of Congressmen selected by local Congress Committees. This brought the number of convictions to upwards of 2,000, mostly in the U.P. In Bengal the campaign excited little public interest and the demonstrators were mostly left at liberty. In the N.W.F.P. only two arrests were made. In April came the fourth and last stage when ordinary 'four-anna' members of the Congress were enrolled. The number of demonstrations and arrests now rose steeply. It reached its peak in May when about 14,000 *satyagrahis* were in prison. Thereafter it steadily fell; and in the autumn appeals were made to Mr. Gandhi to abandon his campaign. But the veteran pacifist—he was 72 in October—held his ground. The campaign, he said, must not be expanded into 'mass-action', as some Congressmen desired, since that would 'embarrass' the Government and 'without communal unity' would

<sup>1</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, pp. 227-33.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 222.

be 'an invitation to civil war'. Nor should it be abandoned. Its strength, he had said at an earlier stage, was irrelevant: it was a 'moral protest', a token of the yearning 'to achieve the freedom of 350 million people through purely non-violent effect and therefore to affect the future destiny of the world'.<sup>1</sup> ('An ambitious claim', he had added, 'but it is there.') So the movement was not 'officially' suspended. It gradually petered out.

Mr. Gandhi's disciples have claimed that credit is due to him for abstaining from 'mass-action', and it is true that the campaign had not seriously 'embarrassed' the Government. But its effects on the general situation were unquestionably harmful. It reinforced the note of unrealism or make-believe in Indian politics. Many of the *satyagrahis*—Mr. Rajagopalachari, for example—were certainly not pacifists, nor could they have believed that any Government, however liberal, could permit unqualified freedom of speech in war time. And the campaign at once evaded and enhanced the real crux of the Indian problem, Hindu-Moslem relations. It was condemned at its outset by the Moslem leaders. Mr. Gandhi's demand meant, said the Premier of the Punjab, 'that, while Britain is engaged in a life-and-death struggle, he should be given freedom to stab her in the back. That the stabbing is to be non-violent makes no difference.'<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jinnah was less concerned with Britain's danger than with that of his community. To yield to the Congress, he said, would put Moslem India 'under the heel of the Hindu Raj'.<sup>3</sup> And, no doubt, the spectacle of the Congress forces, operating according to plan at the behest of their 'super-President', was one of the reasons for the steady growth of Mr. Jinnah's prestige in Moslem circles. On this point the Punjab Premier's attitude was particularly significant. Shortly before the passing of the 'Pakistan resolution', Sir Sikander had expounded in the Punjab Assembly his own solution of the constitutional problem and had pleaded for communal concord in the Punjab as a step towards attaining it in India as a whole. If Pakistan meant, he said, 'a Muslim Raj here and a Hindu Raj elsewhere . . . I will have nothing to do with it'.<sup>4</sup> Yet, not long after, he felt obliged to pay at least lip-service to the official doctrine of the League. In the summer of 1941, when, without conceding Mr. Jinnah's 'fifty-fifty' claim, Lord Linlithgow enlarged the Executive Council and established the advisory Defence Council, Mr.

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India*, 31 October 1941; *Leader*, 21 April 1941.

<sup>2</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, 3 October 1940.    <sup>3</sup> *Statesman*, 25 December 1941.

<sup>4</sup> *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. xvi, no. 8, pp. 359-62.

Jinnah forbade members of the League to serve on either. Sir Sikander and the Premiers of Bengal and Assam, who had accepted appointment on the Defence Council, were ordered to resign and did so. The new Moslem Law Member of the Executive Council was likewise told to resign and on refusal expelled from the League for five years. Mr. Jinnah, moreover, was now seeking to apply to the Moslem-majority Provinces the 'unitarian' technique so firmly applied by the Congress 'Centre' to the Congress Provinces from 1937 to 1939.<sup>1</sup> His Working Committee's resolutions now spoke of their Ministries as 'League Ministries', though in all of them Moslem Ministers were sitting with non-Moslem colleagues. Dictatorship, it was now evident, was not a Congress monopoly. It was evident, too, that, with all the force of the dictator's personality behind it, the trend towards Partition, even in the Punjab, was steadily gathering strength.

There seemed no means of checking it. On the British side Mr. Amery's appeal for 'India First' was censured (as has been seen) by the League, and it was ignored by the Congress. On the Indian side, while Pakistan was ruled out by Hindus as an insufferable 'vivisection of Mother India', no attempt was made to combat it with constructive proposals for a Hindu-Moslem settlement in an undivided India. The official Congress policy still held the field—a popular Constituent Assembly—reinforced now by Mr. Gandhi's demand that Britain should withdraw and leave the rival communities to agree or fight. As to the other parties, no help towards a settlement was to be expected from the Mahasabha, clinging to the dangerous path of Hindu militancy, denouncing Mr. Gandhi's unmanly pacifism on the one hand, deriding the Moslem claim to equality on the other. It is more surprising that the Liberal leaders, those moderate-minded Hindu 'elder statesmen' who had taken so important a share in framing the Act of 1935, did not face the realities of the position, and, if they could not win the votes of the Hindu intelligentsia, at least appeal to their minds. But, while condemning the Congress for its campaign of civil disobedience and the League for its pursuit of a wholly unacceptable Pakistan, they made no attempt to bridge the gulf between the two great parties. So far from welcoming Mr. Amery's repeated suggestions that the best way for Indians to help India on to freedom was to begin without delay to discuss the broad lines of the post-war constitution—to put, in fact, the horse before the cart—they resented them, and attacked Mr. Amery for not conceding an immediate

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 171-2 above.

advance at the Centre—an Executive Council of purely Indian personnel—without considering the attitude of the Congress or the League. In the summer of 1941 it seemed as if at last the nettle was to be grasped. A Non-Party Conference, attended mainly by Hindus but also by one or two Moslems, commissioned Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to initiate an inquiry into the principles of the future constitution. This excellent move was warmly applauded—and that was all.

The stiffening of the political deadlock did not mean that India's war effort was declining. The Indian Army was fighting with all its traditional bravery in Africa and the Middle and Far East, and recruits were streaming in at home at least as fast as they could be equipped. The Indian munitions industry was likewise undergoing a vast expansion, and Indian workers were now producing enough arms and equipment not only for the whole of the Indian Army, except in heavy artillery and tanks, but also for the British forces on the Nile and in the Middle East. The meeting of the Eastern Group Conference at Delhi and the establishment of an Eastern Group Supply Council revealed that India had become a vital economic base for all those parts of the British Empire which bordered on the Indian Ocean and the South-East Pacific. Nor, of course, was it only Indian soldiers and workers that were taking part in the war effort. The Indian members of the Central Executive Council and most of those Indians who attended the Central Legislature, the Ministries of the four non-Congress Provinces—there were soon to be five and ultimately six—and the majorities in the Legislatures which supported them were all wholeheartedly committed to the war. Behind them stood the great body of Indian civil servants, at the Centre and in the Provinces, at least half a million strong. And alongside them stood the Governments and growing forces and expanding factories of the Indian States.

Nevertheless India could not be at war in the way that Britain was at war as long as a majority of politically-minded Indians regarded it with a divided mind. They hated Nazism and Fascism. They sympathised with China and, especially after Hitler's attack on her, with Russia. Save the relatively few who fully shared in Mr. Gandhi's pacifism, they wanted to fight for China and for Russia. But they did not want to fight for Britain, still less under British control. Yet this was a supreme crisis in the history of mankind, and now was the time for India to prove her nationhood, to throw her full strength into the cause of civilisation, to win her right to share in the new post-war ordering of the world. But



that, they were told, was impossible, because, as some said, India was not free or because, as others said, India was not one nation but two. The result was the growth of a sense of frustration and resentment which vented itself in bitter attacks on British policy. On both counts, it was argued, Britain was to blame: she refused India her freedom and deliberately kept it divided as an excuse for the refusal. And, if there were few who meant what they said when they bracketed British imperialism with Nazism and Fascism, most of them seem to have been genuinely convinced that Britain, whatever her statesmen might say, did not intend to release her 'imperial grip' on India. This distrust was unfortunately deepened when in the autumn of 1941 Mr. Churchill stated—and it was true enough—that the authors of the Atlantic Charter had been primarily concerned with the restoration of freedom to the 'nations now under the German yoke'.<sup>1</sup> The explanation that the pledges given to India were wholly in accordance with the Charter and would be fully honoured was ignored. At the end of 1941 there was more disbelief in British honesty than there had ever been before. Thus the element of unreality in Indian politics was reinforced: for it was an unquestionable fact that the British people and their instruments, the British Government and Parliament, had made up their minds that, when the war was over, India should be free as soon as she had devised a constitution by means of which to exercise her freedom.

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, H. of C., ccclxxiv. 68–9.

## X

### Cripps and Gandhi

#### I. REACTION TO THE JAPANESE ADVANCE

**D**URING Mr. Gandhi's long campaign of 'civil disobedience' the danger of the war's approach to India had receded. The Axis had been checked in Egypt and had failed to occupy the Middle East. But in the winter of 1941-2 Pearl Harbour and the spectacular Japanese advance suddenly brought the war as near to India as it had been to Britain in 1940. In March an invasion was thought to be imminent; and it seemed at least doubtful whether the British and Indian forces available would suffice to prevent the irresistible Japanese from overrunning the country as they had overrun Malaya and Burma.

It might have been supposed that the gravity of the danger would have broken the internal deadlock and forced the Indian leaders to join hands both with the British Government and with each other in defence of their threatened country. But this did not happen. Only among those Indians who had shared from the outset in the war effort was the sense of comradeship strengthened by the common danger. Elsewhere antagonism to Britain deepened. The collapse of British sea-power, it was said, had robbed the British Raj of its only useful feature—the security it had given India from invasion—and there was a new bitterness now in the complaint that India had been 'dragged' into the war. If there was little evidence of pro-Japanese sentiment,<sup>1</sup> there was plenty of defeatism. Let us do nothing, some said, to antagonise Japan.<sup>2</sup> Nor was there any narrowing of the Hindu-Moslem breach. The advance of the Japanese seemed actually to widen it.

A few days before Pearl Harbour, as it happened, the Central Government had made a conciliatory gesture. The *satyagrahis* who were still in prison and also Pandit Nehru and Maulana Azad were released. All the Congress leaders were thus free to attend the mid-winter meetings of the Working Committee and the A.I.C.C. They were the first to be held since 1940 when those bodies, after breaking with Mr. Gandhi and proposing a measure

<sup>1</sup> The number of extremists prepared to follow Mr. Bose, ex-President of the Congress (see p. 168 above), who had made his way to the Axis camp, seems to have been small.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Rajagopalachari animadverted on this attitude at a meeting of the A.I.C.C. *Hindu*, 17 January 1942.

of co-operation in the war effort on terms, had been provoked by the 'August Offer' to return to their old allegiance and follow Mr. Gandhi into 'civil disobedience'. Their reaction to the Japanese menace was similar to their reaction to the fall of France, but not the same. Again the 'activists' prevailed over the pacifists, and Mr. Gandhi, refusing to purchase India's independence at the price of a wholehearted participation in the war effort, resigned his direction of Congress policy.<sup>1</sup> But this time there was no suggestion of co-operation. 'At this late stage', said Pandit Nehru, 'to talk of coming to terms with the British Government is out of the question.'<sup>2</sup> No help, it was resolved, could be given to 'an arrogant imperialism which is indistinguishable from Fascist authoritarianism'. The Congress must cope with the coming emergency by itself. It must strengthen its hold on the countryside and, while avoiding conflict with the Government, prepare on its own account 'to face such difficulties as might arise'.<sup>3</sup>

Nor was the League's attitude softened by Pearl Harbour and its sequel. It continued to refuse co-operation in the war effort, and at the end of the year its Working Committee thought it timely to warn the British Government that any change of policy which sought 'the appeasement of the Congress', ignored the claim of the Moslems to Pakistan and contemplated their remaining a minority in an undivided India, would be regarded by them as a breach of faith and resisted 'with all the forces at their command'.<sup>4</sup> The invasion of Malaya made no difference. On February 8, the day on which the Japanese secured a foothold on Singapore Island, the League's official weekly journal filled its front page with a strident manifesto, issued by a body of Moslem students. 'Pakistan is our only demand . . . and by God we will have it.' The response of the Mahasabha to this challenge was just as bellicose. Pakistan, said Mr. Savarkar, was 'a mere fad and a dream'. 'Why hold your threat in abeyance? Why not come out with it to-day?'<sup>5</sup> That was said on March 1, six days before the fall of Rangoon. Clearly the rule that external danger acts as a solvent of internal discord did not apply to India.

Only one authoritative voice was heard at this perilous time, whether in Congress or League circles, proclaiming the need for a common front against the approaching Japanese. Mr. Rajagopalachari not only toured his Province—directly exposed to a

<sup>1</sup> Statement by Maulana Azad, *ibid.*, 16 January 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 16 January 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31 December 1941.

<sup>4</sup> *Indian Annual Register*, 1941, ii. 221-2.

<sup>5</sup> *Tribune*, 4 March 1942.

Japanese assault by sea—calling on all its people to be ready to fight to the death: he pleaded also both for Indo-British and for Hindu-Moslem reconciliation and co-operation. If Britain would 'transfer full responsibility' to a 'National Government' at the Centre, the Congress must be prepared to 'take up responsibility'. 'Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru', he said, 'may distrust the Britisher more than I do. As a preliminary, I shall trust the Britisher more than he does.'<sup>1</sup> At the same time he made an advance towards the League by acknowledging, as no Congress leader had yet done, its place and power in Indian politics. He set it beside the Congress as one of the two 'principal political organisations'. He even bracketed Mr. Jinnah with Mr. Gandhi. 'One has become almost as famous as the other.'<sup>2</sup> On both points this was admittedly a 'parting of the ways' between Mr. Rajagopalachari and Mr. Gandhi; and it is significant that no other Congress leader ventured to follow the former's lead. His gesture to Mr. Jinnah was ignored. As to co-operation on any terms with the British Government, Mr. Gandhi made no concealment of the breach that had opened between him and his old friend.<sup>3</sup> And he chose this moment to nominate Pandit Nehru—whose 'opposition to participation in the war effort', he said, 'is almost as strong as mine, though for different reasons'—as his successor in the leadership of the Congress.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. THE CRIPPS MISSION

Some time before the hope of holding Burma as a bastion for the defence of India faded, the British Government had decided to make another attempt to break the deadlock; but it was not till March 11, four days after the fall of Rangoon, that Mr. Churchill announced that the War Cabinet had come to a unanimous decision on Indian policy with a view to rallying 'all the forces of Indian life to guard their land from the menace of the invader', and that Sir Stafford Cripps, who had recently joined the Government as Lord Privy Seal and become a member of the War Cabinet and Leader of the House of Commons, would go as soon as possible to India for personal consultation with all parties concerned.

To send a Minister of Sir Stafford's standing to discuss a settlement face to face with Indian politicians was an unprecedented

<sup>1</sup> *Hindu*, 17 and 24 January 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Statesman*, 23 January 1942.

<sup>3</sup> *Hindu*, 16 January; *Harijan*, 25 January 1942.

<sup>4</sup> *Statesman*, 23 January 1942.

step, and in leftward circles, at any rate, it was agreed that no better choice of a peacemaker could have been made. An outspoken Radical, well known for his sympathy with Russia, and an old friend of several Congress leaders, especially Pandit Nehru, he was thought to have a stronger chance than any one else could have had of overcoming the obstacles that barred the way to a united Indian war effort. But the very fact that he was *persona grata* to the Congress made him the reverse to the League: and that, no doubt, was the reason why, in his first public statement in India, while frankly admitting that his past contacts had been closer with the Congress than with other parties, he affirmed his conviction that all planning of India's future must pay regard to 'the deep anxieties which undoubtedly exist among the Muslims and the other communities'.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Stafford arrived at Delhi on March 22, and, after meeting Lord Linlithgow and the other members of the Central Government and other high officials, he began a series of private conversations with the leaders of all the political parties. Though the immediate settlement proposed concerned British India only, the suggestions for the future covered Indian India too, and Sir Stafford had interviews accordingly with the representatives of the Princes.

Side by side with these conversations and scarcely less important were the Press Conferences, held at frequent intervals, at which Sir Stafford faced a body of Indian journalists, over one hundred strong and mostly Congressmen, and encouraged them to heckle him. He also gave two broadcasts to the Indian people at large. This public treatment of the issues at stake was the most striking feature of the mission. It brought, it was said, a 'breath of fresh air' to Delhi. It forced the old controversies into the daylight of the open forum. Above all it enabled Sir Stafford to convince the Indian public at the time—whatever may have been said later on—that the British Government's proposals were sincere.<sup>2</sup>

The proposals were embodied in a Draft Declaration which Sir Stafford communicated and explained to a crowded Press Conference on March 29. They may be summarised as follows:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> R. Coupland, *The Cripps Mission*, English edition, p. 25; American edition, pp. 39-40. This is a personal record by the author who was in India when Sir Stafford arrived and was invited by him to join his staff.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, English ed. p. 33; American ed. pp. 49-50.

<sup>3</sup> The full text (published in Cmd. 6350) is printed in *The Cripps Mission*, and as an appendix to Part II of the *Report*.

1. In order to achieve 'the earliest possible realisation of self-government in India', the British Government proposes that steps should be taken to create a new Indian Union which will have the full status of a Dominion with the power to secede, if it chooses, from the British Commonwealth.

2. 'Immediately upon the cessation of hostilities' a constitution-making body shall be set up, representing both British India and the States, and the British Government undertakes to accept and implement the constitution framed by that body on two conditions. (a) Any Province or Provinces which do not acquiesce in the new constitution will be entitled to frame a constitution of their own giving them 'the same full status as the Indian Union'; and any State or States shall be similarly free to adhere to the new constitution or not. (b) A Treaty shall be negotiated between the British Government and the constitution-making body to cover 'all matters arising out of the complete transfer of responsibility from British to Indian hands'.

3. In the meantime the British Government must retain control of the defence of India 'as part of their world war effort', but the task of organising the military, moral and material resources of India rests with the Government of India in co-operation with its peoples, and to that end it invites the immediate participation of their leaders 'in the counsels of their country, of the Commonwealth and of the United Nations'.

These proposals were an advance on the 'August Offer' in four respects. (1) Liberty to secede from the Commonwealth, which had been generally regarded as implicit in Dominion Status, was explicitly affirmed. (2) The responsibility for framing the new constitution was now to be wholly, not primarily, Indian; a concrete plan was submitted for the creation of the constitution-making body; and the British Government pledged itself to accept its conclusions, subject, as before, to the fulfilment of British obligations. (3) A specific method of fulfilling these obligations was now proposed—a bilateral treaty. The position of the Moslem-majority areas was also safeguarded, and that of the States as well, by the right of non-adherence to the new constitution. This was the most sharply criticised feature of the Draft Declaration; but it is difficult to question the psychological truth of Sir Stafford's remark that, 'If you want to persuade a number of people, who are inclined to be antagonistic, to enter the same room, it is unwise to tell them that, once they go in, there is no way out'.<sup>1</sup> To offer the choice of non-adherence, moreover, was the only practical answer to the Congress charge that the British

<sup>1</sup> Broadcast of March 30; *The Times*, 31 March 1942.

Government intended to perpetuate British rule by making abdication conditional on an agreement which it would do its best to prevent. (4) Lastly, the Draft Declaration made it clear that the interim Government was to be a 'National Government' in the sense that its members would not be chosen by the Governor-General as heretofore but would be the 'party leaders' chosen by their parties.

In these respects the Draft Declaration was an advance on the 'August Offer'; but there was one basic point of identity. It proposed no major change in the constitution during the war. Any such change was repeatedly and unequivocally ruled out from the outset by Sir Stafford both in his public statements and in his private conversations.<sup>1</sup>

What chance had the Mission of success? The answer to that, it was agreed, depended on the attitude of the Congress leaders assembled in the Working Committee at Delhi. If they accepted the Draft Declaration, Mr. Jinnah, it was thought, with the option of Pakistan now in his pocket, could scarcely resist the pressure of moderate Moslem opinion and, provided that the League were accorded sufficient seats in the National Government, he would come in. The other minorities, it seemed, would be bound to follow suit, if only to protect their present and future interests. The decision, then, lay primarily with the Congress, and it was soon rumoured that Mr. Gandhi had at once thrown all his weight against acceptance. He returned to his *ashram* in the course of the discussions, bidding the Working Committee to make up its own mind; but he had made no secret, it appeared, of his unqualified rejection of the British offer, involving as it did that Congress co-operation in a war-Government against which he had so persistently set his face. A few days after the negotiations had broken down, he described the British plan as 'on the face of it too ridiculous to find acceptance anywhere'.<sup>2</sup> Other Congress leaders were known to reject the proposals for framing a new constitution, especially the provisions for non-adherence and for the nomination rather than election of the States' representatives on the constitution-making body; but it was thought that some of them, headed by Mr. Rajagopalachari, would be willing that the part of the Draft Declaration relating to the future should be set aside for later discussion and that the Congress, without prejudicing that issue, should accept the invitation to join the proposed National

<sup>1</sup> e.g. in the broadcast cited in the preceding note.

<sup>2</sup> *Harijan*, 19 April 1942.

Government provided agreement could be reached as to the control of defence. Pandit Nehru, it was thought, might be prompted to take this line by his well-known desire to rouse all India to armed resistance to a Japanese invasion and by his trust in the sincerity of Sir Stafford's sympathy with Indian nationalism.

Meanwhile the Japanese were making it clear that the defence of India was indeed the immediate and paramount question—the primary object, as Sir Stafford frequently declared, of his Mission. The report of the occupation of the Andaman Islands, an outpost of India, was published on the day the negotiations began. The British evacuation of Prome was known on April 3. On April 6 the first bombs fell on Indian soil on the sea-board of Madras.

Naturally, therefore, the discussions at Delhi soon centred on defence. The Congress leaders claimed that, in order to rally the Indian public to a maximum effort of patriotism, there must be an Indian Defence Minister. This was conceded on the British side, but it was held that the Commander-in-Chief (then Sir Archibald Wavell) could not transfer his major duties to a civilian colleague in the middle of the war. This obstacle did not seem insuperable. Formulas, apportioning responsibility, were interchanged. On April 9 a settlement seemed in sight. But then the attitude of the Working Committee suddenly stiffened. When its representatives, Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru, saw Sir Stafford on April 10, they passed on from defence to the wider constitutional issue. The only National Government, it now appeared, in which the Congress would participate, must function 'with full powers as a Cabinet with the Viceroy acting as constitutional head'. This was virtually a demand for the immediate acquisition of Dominion Status. The Indian Government was to be as free as the Australian Government. Sir Archibald Wavell's position would be comparable with General MacArthur's. In other words, the national independence of India, contemplated in the Draft Declaration as the outcome of post-war discussion, was to be conceded forthwith.

It had been taken for granted on the British side that the National Government, like the existing Executive Council, would operate by majority decisions and that there would be no more need than there had been in the past for the Governor-General to use his overriding power. In any case it would be harder to use it. For the new Government would be a stronger body than the Council. All its members, it was expected, except the Commander-in-Chief, would be Indians, controlling departments all of which would be more or less concerned with the conduct of the war.



They would be the chosen leaders of the parties, and, since the settlement would presumably result in the return of the Congress members to the Central Legislature,<sup>1</sup> they would all be backed by their party supporters therein. If the Governor-General should wish to override them, he would have to face the prospect of their collective resignation and with it the collapse of the whole system of co-operation which the British Government had so long striven to bring about. Thus, if all went well, the new Government might reasonably be expected to operate in practice as if it were a Cabinet and the Governor-General no more than its constitutional chairman. It would be one more example of the difference in British political technique between *de facto* and *de jure*.

But the majority of the Congress leaders were not content with that. They wanted, it appeared, a formal undertaking that the overriding power would not be used. No such undertaking could be given by the Governor-General without breaking the law. It would require an Act of Parliament, and not a short and simple but a full-scale Act, providing *inter alia* for the discharge of those British obligations—in particular for protecting the rights of minorities—which in the last resort the overriding power was intended to ensure. The Draft Declaration had proposed a constitutional and diplomatic procedure to that end; but the Congress Working Committee had reverted to Mr. Gandhi's strategy of the short-cut—freedom first and a settlement afterwards. And, since they were well aware of Sir Stafford's plain declarations that there could be no basic constitutional change, no major Act of Parliament, in the middle of the war, their claim was tantamount to an ultimatum, breaking off negotiations. Sir Stafford rejected it as he was bound to do, and on April 12 he left Delhi for London.

### 3. MR. GANDHI'S REBELLION

During its brief three weeks' course the Cripps Mission had not only brought Indian public opinion face to face with realities: it had made it seem possible, if only for a moment, that India could be united in resistance to invasion. Its failure killed all such hopes. As soon as the breath of fresh air had ceased to blow, the old sense of impotence and frustration, the old discords, the old evasion of the facts reasserted themselves. Mr. Jinnah, for his part, at once reopened battle. While blaming the British Government

<sup>1</sup> Presumably also the Congress Ministers would resume office in the 'Congress Provinces'.

for making Pakistan merely optional and not conceding it forthwith and outright, he applauded the rejection of the Congress ultimatum. The kind of National Government it demanded, he declared, 'would be a Fascist Grand Council, and Moslem and other minorities would be at the mercy of the Congress'.<sup>1</sup> In Congress circles there was some dissension and despondency, for many Congressmen had hoped that Mr. Rajagopalachari's policy would prevail and deplored the Working Committee's ultimate decision; but the bulk of Congress opinion soon rallied, as it has always rallied at a crisis, to Mr. Gandhi's side. And faith in his leadership was strengthened by the fabrication of another of those unrealities which seem so often to darken and confuse the course of Indian politics. Mr. Gandhi, it appeared, had saved India from a plot. The Mission had been 'a stage-managed show to buy off world-opinion and to foist preconceived failure on the people of India'. Cripps was a more subtle liar than Amery, and his proposals a 'salted mine'. Even Pandit Nehru complained that his old friend had 'allowed himself to become the devil's advocate'.<sup>2</sup>

The path along which Mr. Gandhi intended to lead India was, of course, the one from which he had never swerved—the path of pacifism.<sup>3</sup> But now there was a new urgency, a new intransigence, in his attitude. The Japanese invasion, which was expected within the next few weeks or months, would give him his chance to put his faith to the proof on a gigantic scale. He seems to have believed that the military force available would not suffice to hold the frontier and that the only way to save India from the horrors of forcible conquest was to confront the Japanese armies with a nation-wide campaign of 'non-violent' resistance. But this was plainly impossible as long as the defence of India was in British hands. There was only one way of dealing with that obstacle. The British must go, and go at once.

When the A.I.C.C. met at the end of April, it was presented by the Working Committee with a forthright resolution. The present crisis, it declared, made it impossible for the Congress to consider

<sup>1</sup> *Statesman*, 16 April 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *National Herald*, 24 April and 30 July 1942; *Hindustan Times*, 22 and 27 April.

<sup>3</sup> An illuminating account of Mr. Gandhi's attitude by a non-British observer may be found in *Journey among Warriors* (London, 1943), by Mlle Eve Curie, a gifted representative of the Fighting French, who interviewed Mr. Gandhi while the Cripps Mission was at work. She summarised her conclusions as follows (p. 474): 'For security reasons, Mr. Gandhi must have no part in the government of India during the war. The United Nations cannot win the war by pacifism.'

any proposals for the government of India which retained even a partial measure of British authority. For India's safety and her own, Britain must 'abandon her hold on India'. If invasion comes, it must be resisted; but, since the British Government had prevented the defence of India by its people in any other way, 'such resistance can only take the form of non-violent non-co-operation'.<sup>1</sup>

The passing of the resolution, almost unopposed, was, like the rupture of the Cripps negotiations, a triumph for Mr. Gandhi. The Congress had closed its ranks behind him. Of the two chief critics of his policy only Mr. Rajagopalachari was left, since Pandit Nehru, who had so consistently and vehemently preached violent resistance to the Japanese, had now surrendered to non-violence. And it was evident that Mr. Rajagopalachari could do little by himself either to stem the pacifist tide or to promote a Hindu-Moslem agreement. The resolution he submitted to the A.I.C.C. recommending acquiescence in the principle of Pakistan was rejected by 120 votes to 15;<sup>2</sup> and, when in another series of war speeches in Madras he directly challenged Mr. Gandhi's policy by declaring that it would be a crime for Britain to leave India to chaos and Japanese aggression, he was threatened with 'disciplinary action'. He anticipated it by resigning from the Congress. Only a handful of his old Congress followers, who had backed his brilliant Premiership from 1937 to 1939, backed him now. Even in his own Province the Mahatma's will was law.

From the end of April onwards Mr. Gandhi explained and elaborated his 'Quit India' programme in the columns of *Harijan* and in answers to inquiring journalists. The gist of his doctrine may be found in the following selection from his articles and replies to questions.<sup>3</sup>

The presence of the British in India is an invitation to Japan to invade India. Their withdrawal removes the bait . . .<sup>4</sup>

If India became an independent nation to-morrow, I would certainly plead with the provisional Government to send me, old as I am, to Japan, and I would plead with them in the first instance to free China . . .<sup>5</sup>

We know what American aid means. It amounts in the end to

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 4 May 1942. For Mr. Gandhi's original draft, see *Report*, Part II, p. 289. <sup>2</sup> *Leader*, 30 April 1942.

<sup>3</sup> A useful collection of Mr. Gandhi's sayings is printed in T. A. Raman's *What Does Gandhi Want?* (Oxford, 1943).

<sup>4</sup> *Harijan*, 10 May 1942.

<sup>5</sup> *New York Times*, 5 August.

American influence, if not American rule, added to British<sup>1</sup> . . . America could have remained out of the war, and even now she can do so if she divests herself of the intoxication her immense wealth has produced . . .<sup>2</sup>

I see no difference between the Axis Powers and the Allies. All are exploiters, all resort to ruthlessness to the extent required to compass their end . . .<sup>3</sup>

Leave India in God's hands, or in modern parlance, to anarchy. Then all parties will fight one another like dogs or will, when real responsibility faces them, come to a reasonable agreement . . .<sup>4</sup>

It would be a mistake to interpret these utterances—and there were many others in the same strain—as evidence that Mr. Gandhi was siding with Japan. Except, perhaps, in the last-quoted passage, it is only the 'out-and-out' pacifist talking, above the battle. When American journalists pointed out that the execution of his plan would help the Japanese, since it would put India at their mercy and bring China down, 'I had not the remotest idea', he said, 'of any such catastrophe resulting from my action';<sup>5</sup> and, as he could not 'guarantee fool-proof non-violent action to keep the Japanese at bay', he now conceded that the British and American troops might remain 'under a treaty with the Government of a free India and at the United Nations' expense for the sole purpose of repelling a Japanese attack and helping China'.<sup>6</sup> But this one concession was not so useful as it might at first sight have seemed. For, in the first place, the Allied forces would be helpless without the vigorous backing of the free Indian Government which would control communications, transport, supplies, and all the various indispensable adjuncts of modern warfare; and, secondly, Mr. Gandhi insisted that the Indian Army, which he has always regarded as the tool of British imperialism, should be disbanded as soon as the free Government took over power<sup>7</sup>—a step which, if it could in fact be taken in the middle of the fighting, would completely undermine the defence of India and break the battle front wherever Indian troops were interlinked with other troops of the United Nations overseas.

Meantime Mr. Gandhi had made up his mind to force the issue. When the Working Committee met on July 6, he took his usual part in its discussions and helped, no doubt, to draft the resolution which it published on July 14.<sup>8</sup> The first part of it repeated

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 26 April.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 May.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 June.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 24 May and 14 June.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 28 June.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7 June.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14 July.

<sup>8</sup> *The Times*, 16 July.

the demand for abdication. 'British rule in India must end immediately.' It went on to explain, briefly and confidently, what would happen after that.

On the withdrawal of British rule in India responsible men and women will come together to form a provisional Government, representative of all important sections of the people of India, which will later evolve a scheme by which a Constituent Assembly can be convened in order to prepare a constitution for the government of India, acceptable to all sections of the people.

Except for the somewhat vague proposals for constituting the provisional Government, there was so far no novelty in the resolution. The demand for 'Independence Now' had been made by the Working Committee to the Cripps Mission and confirmed by the A.I.C.C. The 'short-cut' technique—British abdication first and an Indian settlement afterwards—was retained. The old plan for a Constituent Assembly, firmly rejected though it had been by the League, was submitted again as the ultimate solvent of the constitutional problem. Nor was there any change of view as to who was to 'take delivery' from the British Government in the first instance and make the subsequent arrangements. That it would be the Congress was tacitly assumed in the resolution and explicitly asserted by Mr. Gandhi later on when, quoting a statement by Maulana Azad, he said: 'The Congress does not desire to take power for itself but for all. If real power is handed over to the Congress, surely it will approach other parties and persuade them to join.'<sup>1</sup> All this was in tune with what had been said before. The new and sinister feature of the resolution was the threat at the end of it. If the demand for British abdication is rejected,

The Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilise all the non-violent strength it might have gathered since 1920, when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy, for the vindication of political rights and liberty. Such a widespread struggle would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

A final decision on this resolution was to be taken by the A.I.C.C. on August 7, and in the interval Mr. Gandhi resumed his expositor's role. As to the future constitution he had no clear ideas. 'We may quarrel among ourselves or may adjust our quarrels. . . . It may be a democratic constitution or an unadulterated autocracy or oligarchy. There is no end to the possibilities.'<sup>2</sup> Again, 'After the restoration of India to the nation there

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 2 August.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 July.

will be no Central Government. The people's representatives will have to construct it.'<sup>1</sup> But Mr. Gandhi—and this is the startling point—seems to have ignored the question as to what would happen in the interval, or as to how the Allied forces, without any Central Government behind them, could resist the Japanese now threatening the frontiers of Assam and Bengal.

As to the risks of widespread disorder and bloodshed involved in a mass campaign of civil disobedience, Mr. Gandhi was quite frank. He had admitted before, more than once, that he could not promise that there would be no violence, and he now admitted it again. 'If in spite of precautions', he said, 'rioting does take place, it cannot be helped.'<sup>2</sup> Nor did he attempt to soften the militant tone of the resolution. Maulana Azad, seemingly more fearful of the consequences, argued that it was not an ultimatum. Not so Mr. Gandhi. 'There is no room left for negotiation', he told the journalists. 'Either they recognise India's independence or they don't. . . . There is no question of "one more chance". After all this is open rebellion.'<sup>3</sup> In the last article he wrote before his arrest he used the words which became the slogan of the subsequent rising, 'I can but do or die'.<sup>4</sup>

This threat to raise the Hindu masses in defiance of law and order when the Japanese were at the gates of India evoked a chorus of dissent and alarm. No party other than the Congress, no politician outside its ranks, approved of it. The League, the Mahasabha, the Liberals, the Depressed Classes, the National Democrats, the Communists—all denounced it. The most effective, because most closely reasoned, protest was made privately to Mr. Gandhi by Mr. Rajagopalachari and three leading Madras Congressmen.

The withdrawal of the Government [they wrote] without simultaneous replacement by another must involve the dissolution of the State and society itself. However difficult the achievement of a Hindu-Muslim settlement may be while the British Government is here and functioning, it is essential before a demand for withdrawal can reasonably be made. . . . The party to gain immediately by the movement will be Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Meantime the Central Government held its hand. It was hoping, as it afterwards declared, that the universal condemnation of Mr.

<sup>1</sup> *Harijan*, 26 July.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 19 July.

<sup>3</sup> *Times of India*, 15 July.

<sup>4</sup> *Harijan*, 9 August.

<sup>5</sup> This letter was published in January 1943; text in *Report*, Part II, Appendix ix.

Gandhi's policy not only by non-Congress Indians but also in the British and American press would induce 'second thoughts' in the Congress leaders' minds and that, when the resolution of July 14 came up for confirmation by the A.I.C.C. on August 7, the ultimatum at its end might be withdrawn. But in the new edition of the resolution passed by the Working Committee on August 5 the only important change was a slight swing-back from Mr. Gandhi's full-scale pacifism. The Congress, it protested, was not isolationist. A free India would become an ally of the United Nations and would use its arms as well as its non-violent forces in the common cause. But the ultimatum still stood. It was asserted, indeed, that developments since July had confirmed the futility of British promises and the necessity for the immediate ending of British rule. After repeating the proposal for 'a mass-struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale', it called on the people of India to 'hold together under the leadership of Gandhi and carry out his instructions as disciplined soldiers of Indian freedom'.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting of the A.I.C.C. on August 7, attended by about 250 members, was addressed at length by Mr. Gandhi. 'We shall get our freedom by fighting', he said; 'it cannot fall from the skies.' On August 8 the resolution was carried against only thirteen dissentient votes. Mr. Gandhi, identifying, as always, the Congress with the country, accepted the decision as 'the chief servant of the nation'.

The voice within me tells me I shall have to fight against the whole world and stand alone. . . . I cannot wait any longer for Indian freedom. I cannot wait until Mr. Jinnah is converted. . . . If I wait any longer, God will punish me. This is the last struggle of my life.<sup>2</sup>

Early on August 9 Mr. Gandhi, the members of the Working Committee and some other Congress leaders were arrested, and the A.I.C.C. and the Provincial Congress Committees (except in the N.W.F.P.) were banned.<sup>3</sup> A few days later serious disorders broke out simultaneously in various parts of India. They were on the gravest scale in Bihar and in the east of the U.P. In the Punjab, Sind and the N.W.F.P. there was relatively little trouble. Disturbances occurred in a number of States, but were soon suppressed. The attack was mainly directed against communications.

<sup>1</sup> *Leader*, 8 August, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 August.

<sup>3</sup> It was afterwards known that this decision of the Central Government, which, a few weeks earlier, had been again enlarged so as to contain, apart from the Governor-General, eleven Indian and four British members, had been unanimous, and that, as it happened, the three of the British members who were officials were away, two on duty and one through illness.

Mobs, sometimes thousands strong, dislocated railway lines, cut telegraph and telephone wires, and fired some hundreds of railway stations, signal-boxes, and post offices. Upwards of 150 police stations and other Government buildings were also destroyed. The campaign was most successful in the vital strategic area of Bihar. Bengal and Assam were for some time completely isolated from the rest of India, and the troops defending their frontiers cut off from their main channels of reinforcement and supply. War industries were similarly cut off from their chief supply of coal which is in Bihar

The large-scale attack on communications was defeated by the end of August. The second phase of the campaign consisted mainly of isolated acts of sabotage and the distribution of inflammatory leaflets, but there were one or two outbreaks of destructive violence. By the end of the year the force of the rebellion was exhausted. Over 900 insurgents had been killed in the fighting.<sup>1</sup> Some 30 police and 11 soldiers lost their lives. The cost of the damage was estimated at about £1,000,000.

Congress apologists have argued that the tragedy of 1942 was not the Congress' doing, but a spontaneous popular reaction to the provocative arrest of Mr. Gandhi and his fellow patriots. Certainly there is no evidence that specific orders for a general rising were issued by the Congress authorities. Certainly, too, many of the rioters were not Congressmen, but the lawless elements—the terrorists, the criminals, the hooligans—who have always lurked in the background of Indian society. It is clear, on the other hand, that, though the campaign may have been launched unofficially and prematurely, it was a planned campaign, and that many Congressmen took part in it. In several places well-known members of the party were seen inciting and directing the work of destruction.<sup>2</sup> Yet Mr. Gandhi himself has persistently disclaimed even the slightest measure of responsibility. Writing to Lord Linlithgow early in 1943, he declared that he had 'not any conviction of error' and that 'the whole blame' for the tragedy lay with the Central Government.<sup>3</sup> The plain man, who has read what Mr. Gandhi said in the weeks preceding the outbreak and remembers the strength of his hold on the emotions of the Hindu masses, will form his own opinion.

<sup>1</sup> Aircraft were used for reconnaissance and fired on five occasions, after warning, on mobs engaged in destroying railway lines. No bombs were dropped.

<sup>2</sup> The official case against the Congress is stated at length in Cmd. 6430.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 11 February 1943.



## Part Four

# THE FUTURE OF INDIA

### I

## The Present Situation

### I. POLITICS AND ECONOMICS

THE suppression of the rebellion and the confinement of the Congress leaders relieved the military situation. The British and Indian troops could now face the Japanese along the frontier without anxiety as to the safety of their rear. But Mr. Gandhi's reckless policy had gravely impaired the political situation. Not for the first time, his claim to control the fate of India had widened the rifts and worsened the difficulties in Indian politics. He had repudiated the method of adjusting the relations between India and Britain by discussion and consent; he had insisted that India must be freed in his way and at once; and he had exposed the complete futility of the British Government's efforts to obtain the co-operation in the war effort of a party which, in effect, had done its best to sabotage it. And, if the rebellion had thus deepened the breach between the Congress and the British Government, it had also intensified the divisions within India itself. Hindu-Moslem antagonism had been still more inflamed. The Hindus, it seemed to members of the League, had shown to what desperate lengths they would go in order to force Britain to concede a Hindu Raj. The Moslems, it seemed to Congressmen, had shown how lightly they reckoned the cause of India's freedom beside the selfish claims of their community. Nor was the moral of the rebellion lost on the watchful Princes. Defeated, outlawed, its leaders in prison, the Congress was still the dominant force in the Hindu politics of British India, and Mr. Gandhi still its unchallenged master. Were the Princes likelier now to be willing to share with it in framing and working an all-India constitution? So, on all hands, the deadlock, stiff enough before that calamitous autumn, had become stiffer still. Only now, after three years of stagnation, is it beginning to relax.

Not long after the suppression of the rebellion, a remarkable illustration was afforded of the strength of Mr. Gandhi's hold on

Hindu sentiment. Early in 1943, he announced his intention of undergoing another fast, and on February 10 he began it. He was now seventy-three years old, and, as he rapidly lost strength, it was widely believed that the only chance of saving his life was to set him free. A wave of emotion ran through Hindu India and beyond. Perhaps the most striking incident was the conduct of three Indian members of the Central Government. They had all reprobated Mr. Gandhi's policy in the previous summer; they had all joined in the unanimous decision for his arrest; but now, when their colleagues refused to yield to the moral coercion of the fast, they resigned. To the general relief the aged Mahatma survived his self-imposed ordeal. On March 2, at the end of the three weeks he had set himself, he broke his fast.

In the course of the next few months the political problem was overshadowed by an even greater tragedy than the rebellion. The mass of the people in most of eastern India subsists mainly on rice. The Japanese occupation of Burma had cut off the chief supply of imported rice, but the effect of that was far outweighed by the poor yield of the home crop in the winter of 1942-3. Unfortunately this coincided with the disturbances caused by a complex of war-conditions in the normal operation of the grain market throughout India. Many districts were threatened with food shortage in the following spring; but, though all of them suffered from more or less grave scarcity and hardship, the old spectre of real famine was kept at bay except in Bengal. In that Province, with a population of over sixty millions, the shortage was aggravated by a catastrophe of nature. In a large and fertile area a violent cyclone and a tidal wave overwhelmed the crops, destroyed such stocks of food as the countryfolk had kept in reserve, and rendered many of them homeless and destitute. Still more disastrous was the steep rise in prices. Many Bengali producers and dealers made high profits, but many of the poorer rural population could not pay the prices now demanded for their food.<sup>1</sup> In April a flood of refugees came pouring into Calcutta, penniless and foodless. Grain was hurriedly dispatched from more favoured parts of India and relief work was begun, but not in time to save many thousands from death by starvation and exposure in the streets. Meanwhile, though, owing to the lack of good communications, it was not fully realised at the time, the situation in many country districts was even worse. In the end the total death-roll from the

<sup>1</sup> 'Enormous profits were made. . . . A large part of the community lived in plenty while others starved. . . . Corruption was widespread.' *R.F.I.C.*, 107: see next note

famine, including the diseases which inevitably followed in its wake, was reckoned at 1,500,000 people.<sup>1</sup>

The control of the food supply is one of the 'subjects' entrusted solely to the Provinces under the Act of 1935, and responsibility for its management under normal conditions lies solely on the Provincial Governments. But the main blame for the terrible disaster in Bengal cannot fairly be placed on the Ministers who were in office at the time. Khwaja Sir Nazimuddin and his colleagues, most of them members of the Moslem League, had only just come into power, and the previous Premier, Mr. Fazl-ul-Huq, who had headed a succession of Ministries since responsible government began in 1937, had assured his followers and also the Central Government that enough food would be available to prevent a famine. On them, therefore, lay the chief responsibility for the lack of foresight, of information and of precautionary measures. But the new Ministers were scarcely less jealous than their predecessors of interference from outside and scarcely less obstinate in resisting it, and the measures they took to control prices and supplies were ill-conceived and ineffective. The position of the Central Government was more difficult than some of its critics recognised. Under the normal operation of the constitution it was barred from interference in this matter, and, while, since the onset of the war, special war-time legislation had given it emergency powers of intervention and control in every field, it was reluctant, unless the necessity were quite unquestionable, to violate the new principle of Provincial autonomy. The Congress spokesmen, who attacked the Centre for failing to prevent the crisis, forgot that they had denounced those very emergency laws as deliberately designed to rob the Provinces of their self-government and subject them again to an all-powerful 'imperialistic' Centre still under British control. The Centre's intervention, moreover, could only be made effective by giving orders to the Provincial Governments: it possessed no administrative system of its own by which those orders could be carried out. But the Commission subsequently appointed by the Central Government to investigate the causes of the famine took the view that the Central Government could and should have organised the planned movement of foodstuffs between the surplus and the deficit Provinces before the spring of 1943, and that, when in the summer it became clear that the Bengal Government was failing to cope with the disaster, it could and should have intervened

<sup>1</sup> For this paragraph and the next, see the *Report of the Famine Inquiry Commission*, 1945.

to save life whatever constitutional issues might have been involved. It is only fair to remember that the war had put an increasing strain on the Centre, but the sequel suggests that it could have done more than it did. In October 1943, Lord Wavell succeeded Lord Linlithgow as Governor-General, and he at once made intervention effective by obtaining the assistance of the military forces on the spot. The last stage of the calamity was greatly alleviated by the help they gave in the transport of supplies and in checking the spread of disease.

The famine was a grim reminder that for the mass of the Indian people the economic problem was more directly and vitally urgent than the political problem; and the lesson was driven home by the publication of the results of the census held in 1941. The population, it appeared, was still growing fast. Nearly five million more births were occurring every year than deaths. Since so large a portion of the existing population was already living on the margin of subsistence, what was going to happen in five or ten or twenty years' time? Was not India clearly heading for a catastrophe which would dwarf what had happened in Bengal? That practical-minded Indians had realised the appalling gravity of these questions was shown by the publication, early in 1944, of *A Plan of Economic Development for India*, soon popularly known as the 'Bombay Plan'. It was the joint production of eight eminent industrialists and financiers, including four members of the famous Tata firm,<sup>1</sup> three directors of the Reserve Bank of India, and Mr. G. D. Birla, the chief supporter of the Congress Party in the Indian business world. Their proposals must be ranked among the boldest in this age of bold economic planning. Their objective, they declared, was 'to bring about a doubling of the present *per capita* income within a period of fifteen years'. Allowing for the growth of population, that would mean 'the trebling of the present aggregate national income'. 'To achieve this increase, we propose that the plan should be so organised as to raise the net output of agriculture to a little over twice its present figure, and that of industry, including both large and small industries, to approximately five times the present output.'<sup>2</sup> To finance the scheme, which covered the extension of such social services as health and education as well as the improvement of agriculture and the expansion of industry, the capital to be raised would be roughly £7,500 millions.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 57 above.

<sup>2</sup> *A Plan of Economic Development for India* (Penguin Books, 1945), p. 9.

Lord Wavell's statements of policy were in tune with this newly awakened interest in economics. In his first address to the Central Legislature on February 17, he declared that, while the first duty of the Central Government was to do all it could to help in winning the war, it was only less closely concerned with the post-war development of India; and, without accepting its proposals in detail, he welcomed the 'Bombay Plan' as aiming at the same goal as the Government.<sup>1</sup> A few months later, it was announced that an additional seat on the Central Executive Council had been created for planning and development, and that Sir Ardeshir Dalal, a director of the great Tata steel and iron works and one of the authors of the 'Plan', had been appointed to fill it. In the following spring an official statement of policy was issued. Abandoning the old pre-war tradition of non-interference in business, it sketched a programme of vigorous Government action for the rapid industrialisation of India. Its main proposals were that the development of several major industries should become a Central 'subject', that the generation of electric power should become, like the railways and the ordnance factories, a State-owned and State-managed concern as far as possible, and that, if sufficient private capital was not forthcoming, a number of basic industries, including iron and steel, aircraft, motors, machine-tools and chemicals, might also be nationalised. In the field of private enterprise the Government would take various measures to maintain control over the balance of investment, the conditions of labour and the rates of profit, the standard of quality in manufactures, and the healthy distribution of assets as between individuals and communities. It would also promote and finance research.<sup>2</sup> These striking large-scale plans were not the only proof—the interchange of visits by Indian, British and American scientists and business men was another—that both in official and in private circles the immense importance of the economic problem

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 18 February 1944.

<sup>2</sup> P. and D. Department, New Delhi, 23 April 1945. The proposals were sharply criticised in the Hindu press, particularly the suggestion that a communal balance should be maintained in industrial development. This was denounced as an unwarrantable introduction of communalism into India's economic life (*The Times*, 1 May 1945). But, unhappily, it is already there. The fear of a Hindu monopoly of industrial development is (as has been pointed out) one of the major factors in the Moslem reaction against a Hindu Raj. It is common knowledge, again, that, in the discussions which the recent schemes have provoked, while Hindus tend to back the claims of private enterprise, Moslems tend to prefer State control, because it would ensure that in industrial personnel, as in that of the civil services, a quota of appointments would be reserved for Moslems.

had been recognised and that a great deal of practical discussion of it was afoot.

This ought, of course, to have implied a corresponding development in the political field. It was obvious, in the first place, that economic planning must be based on the conditions in all parts of India and that it required for its success the greatest possible measure of co-operation throughout the country. The Bombay planners, indeed, frankly based their scheme on the assumption that all India would be united in a Federation and that the jurisdiction of the Federal Government 'in economic matters' would extend through all the Provinces and States. 'No development of the kind we have proposed will be feasible except on the basis of a central directing authority which enjoys sufficient popular support and possesses the requisite powers.'<sup>1</sup> The Government proposals, likewise, for a great increase in centralised control seemed to imply the formation of a single Federal Centre with wide powers. But, in the existing state of Hindu-Moslem tension and in face of the League's demand for Pakistan, was it reasonable to expect that such a Centre could be agreed on? And, until at least the main principles of a constitutional settlement were determined, until at any rate it was known whether India was to constitute a single federated sovereign State or to be partitioned into two or more such States, were not the planners building castles in the air? These considerations applied as much to official as to unofficial planning, and as regards the former there was a further difficulty. To what lengths could the Government go in working out plans for the future? How far could it commit itself? They must be mainly long-term plans. If the hopes of an early settlement were realised, the existing Government would not be responsible for carrying them out.

It was with such thoughts, no doubt, in mind that Lord Wavell, in the speech mentioned above, stressed the need for unity and co-operation. Speaking, as he said, 'frankly and bluntly as I have been taught to speak as a soldier', he reaffirmed the natural unity of India. 'No man', he said, 'can alter geography'; and he reminded his audience that within natural geographical units elsewhere—in Britain, in Canada, in Switzerland—peoples of different nationality, of different race and faith and culture, had continued to live together. Ireland, on the other hand, has 'a sort of Pakistan'. There was a wealth of precedents, in fact, for Indian constitutionalists to study; and any authoritative body that was set up

<sup>1</sup> *A Plan of Economic Development for India*, p. 8.

to hammer out a settlement could count on such help as it might need from the Government. As soon as a new constitution had been framed and brought into operation, the final transfer of power could be made. The 'Cripps Offer' stood. Meantime 'the country's government must continue to be a joint British and Indian affair, with the ultimate responsibility still remaining with the British Parliament, though it is exercised through a predominantly Indian Executive'.

For the present, and until the change-over could be effected, he asked once more for the co-operation of all parties both in helping to bring the war to an end as soon as possible and in planning India's future. As to the Congress, 'I recognise', he said, 'how much ability and high-mindedness it contains; but I deplore its present policy and methods as barren and unpractical. . . . If its leaders feel that they cannot consent to take part in the present Government of India, they may still be able to assist in considering the future problems. But I see no reason to release those responsible for the declaration of 8 August 1942, until I am convinced that their policy of non-co-operation and even of obstruction has been withdrawn—not in sackcloth and ashes: that helps no one—but in recognition of their mistaken and unprofitable policy.'<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly this appeal was in accord with moderate Indian opinion at the time. The Liberals had recently called on the leaders of all other parties 'to convene a conference and to co-operate in forming national and composite Governments in the Provinces and at the Centre'. Their only serious point of difference was on the question of the Congress leaders. While repeating their condemnation of the 'Quit India' policy, they asked for its authors to be unconditionally released 'in the hope and belief that the Congress leaders will accept the wishes of millions in this country and agree to treat the resolution of August 1942 as a dead letter'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly moderate was Mr. Rajagopalachari's attitude. In a series of speeches and in a widely read pamphlet<sup>3</sup> he had continued to preach his doctrine of 'back to Cripps'. The 1942 proposals, he declared, were 'a *bona-fide* gesture by the British Government to the people of India and not a measure of mere expediency or appeasement'.<sup>4</sup> 'The British Government could not offer a scheme going further than that embodied in those proposals on the point of national independence.'<sup>5</sup> In conceding to the Moslems and to

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 18 February 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Reuter, Bombay, 30 December 1943.

<sup>3</sup> *The Way Out* (Oxford, 1942).

<sup>4</sup> Reuter, Madras, 5 October 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *The Way Out*, p. 17.

the States the option of joining in the Union or staying out, they had recognised the facts 'inherent in the situation as it has developed out of history'. To reject those proposals was a blunder, and they ought to be accepted now, both for the formation of an interim National Government and for the drafting of the new constitution. 'In 1919 and again in 1930, we<sup>1</sup> refused our co-operation in the making of the constitution, and, though this refusal may have helped to vindicate national self-respect, it did not help in a positive way, but left constructive work to reactionary elements. It will be sad if that mistake is repeated for a third time.'<sup>2</sup>

But Mr. Rajagopalachari still stood alone. No more now than at any time since his breach with Mr. Gandhi and resignation from the Congress did he obtain any backing from within its ranks. It seems probable that many Congressmen regretted in their hearts the course to which Mr. Gandhi had committed the whole party in 1942; but they were, if anything, less willing than they had been then to question his authority, now that they were barred from all communication with him. Nor, if they had known what he was thinking, would they have been encouraged to listen to Mr. Rajagopalachari. From time to time Mr. Gandhi was writing to Lord Wavell as he had written to Lord Linlithgow, and, when the correspondence was published in June 1944, it was clear to all the world that he had not so far budged an inch from the position he had taken up in 1942. He continued to argue that the fateful resolution was framed to serve the interests not only of India but of Britain and the United Nations and that the blame for the subsequent disorder and bloodshed lay entirely on the Government. To Lord Wavell's plea for co-operation in the existing administration, Central and Provincial, or, failing that, at least in the discussion of the problems of the future, his response amounted to a flat refusal. Co-operation, he wrote, required equality and mutual trust between the parties. Both were wanting. Nor had Congressmen any faith in the Government's competence 'to ensure India's future good'. There was no sign in these letters of a change of attitude, of a more constructive or conciliatory policy than 'Quit India'. He allowed himself, indeed, to coin another of those extravagant phrases which had done so much harm in 1942. Forgetting, it would seem, that responsible parliamentary government was operating in six of the eleven Provinces and might be operating in them all if the Congress had so wished—forgetting, too, that

<sup>1</sup> 'We' can only mean the Congress here.      <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 28.



eleven of the sixteen members of the Central Government were now Indians, that its decisions were majority-decisions, and that it was never overruled from London<sup>1</sup>—India to-day, he said, 'is one vast prison containing 400 million souls'.<sup>2</sup>

The response of the other great party to Lord Wavell's appeal was scarcely less discouraging. The events of 1942 had strengthened the hold of the League on Moslem opinion. It was now the dominant element in the Governments and Legislatures of Bengal, Sind and Assam; the North-West Frontier Province, a 'Congress Province' from 1937 to 1939, had recently been released from 'Governor's Rule' by the formation of a League Ministry; and, if the Punjab was controlled by the Unionist Party, most of its members were also members of the League. Mr. Jinnah, moreover, whose mastery of the League is at least as unquestioned as Mr. Gandhi's mastery of the Congress, was engaged in this period in consolidating its forces. In order to unite the Moslem 'nation' in opposition to a Hindu Raj, he had adopted the Congress' unitarian technique; and, just as the Governments of the Congress Provinces had been subjected to the control of the Congress 'Centre', so the Governments of the Moslem-majority Provinces, though they all contained one or more non-Moslem Ministers who could not belong to the League, were to be called 'Moslem League Governments' and controlled by the 'Central' League executive. In all the Provinces concerned except one this régime was more or less effectively imposed. But in the Punjab—and the Punjab was the core of Pakistan—Mr. Jinnah was confronted by an old-established local 'patriotism', a pride in the peculiar character of the country and its people and in their historic traditions, which made interference from outside more difficult than in any other Province. The Provincial Government had been gravely weakened by the premature death of Sir Sikander Hyat Khan at the end of 1942—the man to whom, as Premier, the outstanding success of parliamentary government in the Punjab since 1937 had been mainly due and to whom the more moderate-minded Moslems had looked for leadership. But his successor and his colleagues held their ground. It was impossible, they argued, to identify their Government with the League and accept its control because it was a

<sup>1</sup> Speaking at Birmingham in the spring of 1944, Mr. Amery (Secretary of State for India) said that 'during the time he had been at the India Office there had not been a single instance in which he or the Viceroy had overriden the views of the majority of the Viceroy's Council'. *Birmingham Post*, 1 May 1944.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 21 June 1944.

coalition Government with Sikh and Hindu members, on the maintenance of which the communal peace of the Province depended. Mr. Jinnah's attack continued till at last, in June 1944, the Premier was expelled from the League—an incident which recalled Mr. Rajagopalachari's virtual expulsion from the Congress—and its electoral support of the Unionist Party withdrawn. That in itself, however, was a sign of Mr. Jinnah's failure. He had certainly shaken the Government, but he had not brought it down.

Meantime, his attitude to the major problem of India's future was quite unchanged. The Moslem-majority Provinces must have Pakistan, he repeated again and again, and Pakistan meant sheer Partition with no link left between the parts save such voluntary agreements as might be concluded between wholly independent sovereign states. If Britain were honest, she would admit the necessity of this division of India. He had criticised the Cripps proposals because they conceded only the principle of Pakistan and did not make its realisation a condition of the settlement. At a Session of the League, at the end of 1943, he went further. Partition, he said, should not be left to the decision of the Indian parties. The British Government should put it through. Then, and only then, it would be able to transfer power to a free Pakistan and a free Hindustan. And he matched the Congress' 'Quit India' with a new slogan for the League, 'Divide and Quit'.<sup>1</sup> That in effect was the only answer he gave some weeks later to Lord Wavell's appeal for co-operation. He denounced his pointed reference to geography as deliberately provocative, and, echoing the language so often used by Congress spokesmen, he declared that the British Government's demand for a unity which it knew to be unobtainable was merely a device for maintaining its 'imperialistic stranglehold' on India.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jinnah, in fact, seemed to have closed his mind, as obstinately as Mr. Gandhi, to the necessity of the Hindu-Moslem problem being solved by agreement between Hindus and Moslems. Both of them were demanding that the British Government should deal with it for them, and by methods that were equally impracticable. 'Divide and Quit' meant imposing Partition by force. 'Quit India' meant leaving her peoples to fight it out.

## 2. MR. GANDHI AND MR. JINNAH

While Indian politics remained in the grip of a seemingly unbreakable deadlock, the external situation was being rapidly

<sup>1</sup> *Times of India*, 27 December 1943.    <sup>2</sup> *Reuter*, Bombay, 11 March 1944.

transformed. By the end of 1943 the United Nations had obtained the initiative both in Europe and in Asia. In 1944 they were advancing. And, as the menace of a Japanese invasion of India steadily receded, even those 'defeatists' who had hastily announced the British Empire's doom were now obliged to admit the probability that the United Nations would eventually win the war. Plainly, however, a long, hard struggle had still to be faced, and among those who were sharing in the war effort there was no more relaxation in India than elsewhere. The stream of recruits brought the strength of the Indian Army up to two million and beyond; and the output of Indian war industries continued to rise. Meanwhile, the removal of the immediate danger and the prospect of the downfall of the Axis, distant though it still might be, were turning the minds of the intelligentsia towards the new post-war order of the world. Ought not India to take her part in shaping it? Was not this a new and cogent reason for her liberation? And was that liberation nearer now—or farther off? Among Congressmen, at any rate, British sincerity was still distrusted; and it was argued that a victorious Britain would be less willing to loosen her hold on India than a Britain facing disaster. The 'Cripps Offer' had been made when she was weak. Having been rejected, might it not be withdrawn now that she was strong again? Mr. Rajagopalachari's answer to those questions was confirmed, as has been seen, by Lord Wavell, and he in turn was backed by the Secretary of State. The Cripps proposals remained open 'in all their generous amplitude', said Mr. Amery in the course of a debate in the House of Commons which revealed a striking consensus of party opinion;<sup>1</sup> 'we shall stand by them in the hour of victory as we did in days of adversity'.

When Mr. Amery made that speech, Mr. Gandhi had recently emerged from his enforced retirement. An attack of malaria had seriously impaired his health, and on that account he was unconditionally released from detention on May 6. He at once took the centre of the public stage. All eyes were turned towards the beach near Bombay where for a time he rested and recovered strength; and it was as manifest as ever that, because of his hold on the heart of the Hindu majority in India, he could, given the understanding and the will, do more than anybody else to promote a general settlement. But the few public statements he allowed himself afforded little ground for hope that his attitude to the Government had changed. He gave no sign as yet that he thought the 'Quit

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, H. of C., 28 July 1944, cccii. 1106.

India' policy was now out of date. At previous crises he had shown no hesitation in declaring his opinion and inducing his colleagues sooner or later to adopt it. Now he was more diffident. 'What can I do?' he said: 'I cannot withdraw the "August Resolution"', since, it was explained, it could only be withdrawn by the A.I.C.C. who had passed it.<sup>1</sup> 'Even if I was quite well,' he wrote to Lord Wavell, 'I could do little or nothing unless I know the mind of the Working Committee of Congress.'<sup>2</sup> A few weeks later Mr. Gandhi took a bolder line. He now told Lord Wavell that he would advise the Working Committee that in the changed situation civil disobedience was no longer practicable and that the Congress ought now to co-operate fully in the war effort—on two conditions. First, the independence of India must be immediately declared. Second, a National Government must be formed at the Centre, responsible to the Central Assembly and in control of all matters except military operations during the war.<sup>3</sup> This second demand was virtually identical with the ultimatum which had brought the Cripps Mission to an end, and Mr. Gandhi can scarcely have supposed that it could be accepted.

But, if he was unwilling to commit himself to a real change of policy towards the Government, he was ready, it seemed, to renew the attempts he had made, on the eve of the rebellion, to persuade the Moslem League to join forces with the Congress.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to Mr. Jinnah, written in 1943, he had proposed that they should meet. 'Why should not both you and I approach the great question of communal unity as men determined on finding a common solution?'<sup>5</sup> The Government's decision to allow Mr. Gandhi to take no part in politics during his detention had precluded the delivery of this letter, and its contents were only known to Mr. Jinnah when, shortly after his release, Mr. Gandhi authorised its publication. Mr. Jinnah made no comment. In July, at about the same time as his new approach to Lord Wavell, Mr. Gandhi renewed his request for a meeting, and now Mr. Jinnah replied inviting him to his house at Bombay in August.<sup>6</sup> They met on September 9.<sup>7</sup>

If these two men could have re-established a Congress-League accord and could then have persuaded their respective parties to accept it, the major obstacle to the swift and complete emancipa-

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, June 1, 1944: Press telegram, New Delhi, June 5, 1944.

<sup>2</sup> Reuter, New Delhi, 1 July 1944.

<sup>3</sup> G. to W., 27 July 1944.

<sup>4</sup> *Report*, Part II, pp. 298-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Dawn*, 17 May 1944.

<sup>6</sup> G. to J., 17 July; J. to G., 24 July 1944. Information Dept., I.O.

<sup>7</sup> The delay was due to Mr. Jinnah's temporary indisposition.

tion of India would have been removed. And, if their record did not suggest that the concessions and compromises needed would be forthcoming, it could not be denied that at the outset they were nearer together—or at least Mr. Gandhi was nearer to Mr. Jinnah—than ever before. For Mr. Gandhi, seemingly under Mr. Rajagopalachari's influence, was now prepared to acquiesce in the principle of Pakistan. Up to the rebellion, despite his anxiety to obtain the League's support, he had consistently denounced Partition in the strongest terms, and it was mainly the sharp conflict of opinion on that issue that had driven Mr. Rajagopalachari out of Congress politics. Yet it was Mr. Rajagopalachari's formula for a Hindu-Moslem pact which Mr. Gandhi now submitted to Mr. Jinnah. Its provisions may be summarised as follows. (1) The Moslem League was to endorse the Indian demand for independence and to co-operate with the Congress in forming a provisional government for the 'transitional period'. (2) At the end of the war a commission would demarcate those contiguous areas in north-west and north-east India in which the Moslems are in an absolute majority, and in those areas a plebiscite of all the inhabitants would decide whether or not they should be separated from Hindustan. (3) In the event of separation, agreements would be made for defence, commerce, communications and other essential purposes. (4) 'These terms shall be binding only in case of transfer by Britain of full power and responsibility for the governance of India.'<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Rajagopalachari had proffered this compact to Mr. Jinnah on his own account a few weeks earlier, but nothing had then come of it. And nothing came of it now. The conference lasted over a fortnight. The two negotiators met frequently and alone. Between the meetings they exchanged a number of letters. Their publication, when the conference was over, revealed the course it had taken. After disputing Mr. Gandhi's right to speak for the Congress with the same authority as he for his part could speak for the League, Mr. Jinnah firmly rejected the proposals. In the first place he pointed out that Pakistan was not the bundle of contiguous areas offered him but the whole of the 'Six Provinces'—Sind, the Punjab, Baluchistan, the N.W.F.P., Bengal and Assam—subject only to adjustments of their frontiers; secondly, that the non-Moslem inhabitants of those 'Moslem homelands' were not entitled to a voice in determining their fate; and thirdly—in reply to Mr. Gandhi's suggestion that, if Pakistan were decided on,

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 10 July 1944.

matters of common concern might be dealt with by a joint board of control—that there could be no matters of common concern to two separate sovereign states. And, if the kind of settlement proposed was thus quite unacceptable to Mr. Jinnah, so was the method and the timing for bringing it about. The actual wording of the formula quoted above did not make it clear whether the decision on Partition should be made, and, if in favour of it, put into effect, before or after the full transfer of power from the British to an Indian Government. Whatever Mr. Rajagopalachari's interpretation may have been, there was no doubt about Mr. Gandhi's. He had not abandoned his 'cart-before-the-horse' technique. He continued to insist that Hindu-Moslem unity was 'not to be achieved without the foreign ruling power being ousted'. Any pact concluded now would be implemented in the constitution to be framed 'by the Provisional Government contemplated in the formula or by an authority specially set up by it *after British power is withdrawn*'—a reversion, in fact, to the sort of procedure contemplated in the 'Quit India' resolutions of 1942. Even if the kind of Pakistan offered him had been acceptable, Mr. Jinnah was bound to reject this method of bringing it into being. He had always made it plain that the 'division' must precede the 'quitting'.<sup>1</sup>

In Hindu circles the breakdown of the negotiations was regarded with mixed feelings. The more moderate-minded regretted, no doubt, that yet another attempt at a Hindu-Moslem *entente* had failed. But there were many Hindus—and not only in the ranks of the uncompromising Mahasabha—who heard of the breakdown with relief, so anxious were they lest their great leader should commit himself to the 'vivisection of Mother India'. The spokesmen of the League, for their part, rejoiced that the Moslems had been saved from falling into yet another Hindu trap. Yet it could not be said that the prospects of an ultimate Hindu-Moslem settlement had been worsened by the conference. The gulf was no wider. It had narrowed, indeed, in one important respect. Not so very long ago, Mr. Gandhi had claimed that the Congress represented all the peoples and communities of India and was entitled to 'take delivery' of the government without prior agreement with any other party.<sup>2</sup> Now he had at last admitted 'the preponderating influence and position of the Moslem League' in Moslem politics and was prepared to discuss with its leader a programme of

<sup>1</sup> The correspondence was published in all the leading Indian newspapers.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 173 above.

joint action. That, at any rate, sounded a new note of realism. In his attitude to the British Government, on the other hand, there was no such healthy change. He made it plain that he did not want to come to terms with Britain and that his primary purpose in trying to come to terms with the League was to unite its forces with those of the Congress in order to compel an immediate British abdication, whatever the effect might be on the internal peace of India. In one of his letters to Mr. Jinnah there was a passage which clearly echoed the desperate language he had used in 1942.

The only real, though awful, test of our nationhood arises out of our common political subjection. If you and I throw off this subjection by our combined effort, we shall be born a politically free nation out of our travail. If by then we have not learnt to prize our freedom, we may quarrel among ourselves, and, for want of a common master holding us together in his iron grip, seek to split up into smaller groups or nationalities. There will be nothing to prevent us falling to that level, and we shall not have to go in search of a master. There are many claimants to a throne that never remains vacant.

### 3. DISCUSSION OF A SETTLEMENT

Soon after the breakdown of the Gandhi-Jinnah negotiations another move was made towards a settlement. It came from the Liberals, the group of Hindu 'elder statesmen', most of whom had had a close and lengthy experience of constitution-making in the days of the Round Table Conference and the Act of 1935. As long ago as the summer of 1941, the Non-Party Conference, a predominantly Liberal body, had authorised Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru to set on foot an inquiry into the principles of a new constitution; but nothing was done. Now, in November 1944, the standing sub-committee of the Conference renewed the invitation, and this time Sir Tej promptly acted on it. It appeared, indeed, that he had taken the initiative himself. He had approached Mr. Gandhi, he explained, after the failure of the conference with Mr. Jinnah, and had suggested to him that he himself should summon a 'national convention'. This Mr. Gandhi had declined, but he had readily agreed when Sir Tej then proposed that the Non-Party Conference should take the matter up—on one condition, namely, that no member of the Congress or the League or the Mahasabha or any other important party nor any one who had recently committed himself to a definite opinion should serve on the projected body. Unhappily the Mahatma's blessing did not render the plan

more attractive to the League whose spokesmen had long been accustomed to denounce the Liberals as players of Mr. Gandhi's game, all the more dangerous to the Moslem cause because of their seeming aloofness from the Congress. In any case Mr. Jinnah's reaction was almost a matter of course. When Sir Tej, having now formed his 'Conciliation Committee' (as it was presently called), asked him for an interview 'in order to obtain clarification on the practical aspects of the problem' of Pakistan, he replied that he could not recognise the Non-Party Conference or its Committee and therefore could not do what he was asked. Sir Tej, thereupon, announced that his Committee would proceed with its inquiry on the basis of the League's resolutions, Mr. Jinnah's speeches and letters and other relevant material. Equally inevitable was Sir Tej's difficulty as to the Moslem representatives on his Committee. He eventually obtained the services of five in a total membership of twenty-nine; but none of them was an outstanding personality in the Moslem community. Discouraging, too, was the failure to secure the co-operation of Dr. Ambedkar, the acknowledged leader of the Scheduled Castes. The two *harias* appointed on the Committee had little standing. This weakness in the representation of the two greatest minorities was accentuated by the strength of the Hindu quota which included Mr. Jayakar and Mr. N. R. Sarkar. The Central Government's promised sympathy with any authoritative effort to tackle the constitutional problem was duly forthcoming: the information and statistics asked for were promptly supplied. And the comprehensive and straightforward questionnaire, drafted at the end of December for circulation to all parties, was proof that the Committee knew its way about the complex constitutional field. It put the right questions, and it put them plainly. Whatever the upshot might be, Sir Tej and his colleagues were evidently intending to do what—it had long seemed obvious—had to be done if ever the deadlock was to be broken. The real facts and issues were to be examined and discussed in India by Indians.<sup>1</sup>

While the Committee was at work during the early months of 1945, the pattern of Indian politics was shifting. Though most of its leaders were still in detention, the Congress had become more active and seemed to be regaining some of the ground it had lost before and after the rebellion. It had abandoned its boycott of the Central Assembly in the previous November, and in the course

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Amery had pleaded for Indian investigations of this kind as long ago as 1940. *Report*, Part II, 258.



of the winter session it succeeded, in conjunction with other parties, in securing the Government's defeat on four or five occasions. Developments in the Provinces were of greater practical importance. The fall of the non-Congress Ministry in Orissa in the summer of 1944 had been only a negative success: it had been impossible to form a Congress Ministry and the administration had been taken over by the Governor (Sir Hawthorne Lewis) under 'Section 93'. A more positive achievement was the defeat of the Moslem League Ministry in the North-West Frontier Province in March 1945 and its replacement by a Congress Ministry under the same Premier, Dr. Khan Sahib, who had resigned with his colleagues in 1939. A few weeks later Sir Muhammad Saadullah, Premier of Assam, whose ministry had been hailed by Mr. Jinnah as one of his 'Moslem League Ministries', came to terms with his Congress opponents and reconstituted his Cabinet. The Congressmen would not accept any seats in it, but they undertook to support it in the Legislature on the understanding that most of the persons detained on political grounds should be released and most of the existing restrictions on political activity withdrawn. Clearly these events implied a change in Congress policy. All the Provincial Governments are expressly or tacitly committed to full co-operation in the war effort; and if, as was generally understood, Mr. Gandhi had agreed to the Congress resuming office in the N.W.F.P.—among whose Pathan people the influence of his pacifism had been less than anywhere else in India—to that extent he had acquiesced in the Congress taking a direct part in the war.<sup>1</sup> To support the Assam Ministry, similarly, was to support the war effort. But on the other cardinal issue—the question of Congress-League coalitions—there was apparently no change in the Congress policy of 1937. The Congress was not to join in a coalition in Assam, and the new N.W.F.P. Ministry was again the 'pure' Congress Ministry it had been from 1937 to 1939.

Those were not the only rebuffs which Mr. Jinnah suffered at this time. The power of the League in Bengal is only less important than its power in the Punjab, and the Bengal Ministry, unlike that of the Punjab, had identified itself with the League. But in the course of 1944 its position was undermined by the general deterioration of Bengal politics. It might have been expected that the famine would have had a sobering effect, that party strife would have lost its edge in a common desire to work for the

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Khan Sahib pledged himself to support the war effort, and stood beside the Governor (Sir George Cunningham) at the V.E. Day parade.

recovery of the Province from the worst disaster it had suffered for generations past. But nothing of that sort happened. On the contrary, party faction had never been so violent and irresponsible. In order to prevent the passage of a bill dealing with secondary education—a highly controversial question because of its communal implications—the Opposition drowned debate in disorder. Once an attempt was made to carry off the mace. The deadlock brought about by this travesty of parliamentary government was only ended by the prorogation of the session by the Governor (Mr. R. G. Casey). When the Assembly met again, the proceedings were more orderly, and the Ministry was threatened not so much by the violence of the Opposition as by intrigue and dissension within the ranks of its own supporters. At the end of March (1945), a group of them crossed the floor of the house, and Ministers were defeated. Thereupon, the Governor, confronted with the necessity of securing supply for the next financial year by April 1, and with the certainty that no stable Ministry could be constituted, took over the government under 'Section 93'.

At the same time a similar situation had developed in Sind. There, too, the 'Moslem League Ministry' was defeated owing to discord among its supporters; but in this case, after a vigorous personal intervention by Mr. Jinnah, a new 'League Ministry' was formed under the previous Premier, Sir G. H. Hidayatullah. This demonstration of Mr. Jinnah's authority scarcely compensated for the setbacks which the League had suffered in the N.W.F.P. and Bengal; but it was difficult to determine to what extent those setbacks affected its position and prospects as a whole. The results of the by-elections during the last two years had been as favourable as before. Of the 11 elections to Moslem seats in the Provinces from the middle of 1943 to the middle of 1945 the League won 8, independent Moslems 3, Congress Moslems none. All four of the elections to the Central Legislature were won by the League.<sup>1</sup> Naturally enough, Mr. Jinnah claimed that this trend would be confirmed if general elections were held for all the Legislatures, and meantime he refused to make the slightest change of front.

<sup>1</sup> The Provincial figures do not include Bengal whence the results are not yet available. In the Punjab the Unionist Party and the League fought elections on a single 'ticket' till the rupture occurred in May 1944. The one Unionist victory since that date has been listed under 'independent Moslems'. For the results up to the summer of 1943, see p. 184 above. The totals for the Provinces since 1937 and for the Centre since 1934 taken together now read: League 66, independent Moslems 18, Congress Moslems 6.

'We will fight for Pakistan and die for Pakistan,' he had said in January.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan, he said in March, 'is our irrevocable and unalterable national demand. . . . We shall never accept any constitution on the basis of a united India.'<sup>2</sup>

If, then, there was some movement in British Indian politics, it could hardly be described as a loosening of the deadlock. And in Indian India there was no movement at all. If any hopes had been entertained that the Princes would regard the situation in British India as a challenge to their patriotism and statesmanship and take the initiative in promoting the discussion of an all-India settlement, they were disappointed. The declaration by the Nizam of Hyderabad, the premier Moslem Prince, that the 'historical alliance' between the States and the Paramount Power could never be severed<sup>3</sup> was not a constructive contribution to the problem of India's future status. And if one or two of the leading Hindu Ministers in the States rightly stressed the value of Indian unity, they did it in such uncompromising terms as were little calculated to appease the spirit of Moslem separatism. Sir C. P. Ramaswami Aiyer, *diwan* of Travancore, baldly reaffirmed his previous condemnation of Partition. 'As far as this Government is concerned and as far as I can predict of other States . . . they will not assent or be a party to any variant of Pakistan.'<sup>4</sup> Sir B. L. Mitter, *diwan* of Baroda, called for a strong Federal Government.<sup>5</sup> But it could not safely be inferred that the Princes as a whole were readier now than in 1937 to make the sacrifices required for any Indian Federation. That they were deeply concerned, at any rate, to maintain their rights under the existing constitution was shown by their sharp dispute with the Paramount Power in 1944. It culminated in the resignation of the standing committee of the Chamber of Princes at the end of the year; and it was not till the summer of 1945 that harmony was restored. The origin of the dispute was

<sup>1</sup> Press telegram, New Delhi, 16 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 March 1945. At the end of January, Mrs. Pandit was reported to have said at Washington: 'India is one large concentration camp. The country has no religious differences: our one religion is the religion of freedom.' (Reuter, Washington, 30 January 1945.) Mrs. Pandit is Jawaharlal Nehru's sister. She was a member of the Congress Ministry in the U.P. (1937-9), in charge of the department of Local Government and Health. Arrested with the other Congress leaders in 1942, she had been released in 1944, and was now visiting the United States as one of the Indian delegates at a conference of the Institute of Pacific Relations.

<sup>3</sup> Reuter, Hyderabad, 30 July 1944.

<sup>4</sup> Press telegram, New Delhi, 17 August 1944. 'Variant' clearly means 'variety' or 'kind', not something different from the official version.

<sup>5</sup> *The Times*, 3 May 1945.

not made public, but it was generally attributed to a growing uneasiness among the Princes as to the political and economic future of the States as a whole and in particular as to alleged encroachments by the Political Department at the Centre on the domestic autonomy of individual States.

Meantime, public opinion in Britain was becoming increasingly impatient with the long protraction of the deadlock. It had welcomed the British Government's undertaking in 1942 to convoke a constitutional convention immediately after the war and to acquiesce in any settlement acceptable to the major Indian parties and conformable with British obligations. Nor had it been questioned at that time that it was no longer Britain's business to take a hand in constitution-making, that it was now for the Indians alone to frame their own system of government as the peoples of the Dominions had framed theirs. That this would prove a harder task in India than it had in the Dominions had been plain enough, but it had been widely hoped that the difficulties and dissensions would somehow be overcome when Indian patriots of all communities and parties realised that only by a settlement of some sort could they attain full freedom. But three years had passed since the Cripps Mission, and the prospects of agreement between the main political forces in India seemed no brighter now than they did then. The appointment of the Conciliation Committee was a hopeful sign, but it was feared that the chances of its success were gravely impaired by its inadequate representation of the great minorities. Thus the desire which the British people as a whole had clearly manifested since the outset of the war to see India attaining the same free status as the Dominions as soon as the fighting was over seemed to have been thwarted. The German war, at any rate, was evidently nearing its end, and to all appearance the Japanese war likewise would be ended with the Indian problem still unsolved. Hence the sense of frustration, so long prevalent in India, began to spread to Britain. Even those who had been most sympathetic with Indian nationalism began to wonder whether in fact it was capable of realising its nationhood unaided; and the question was raised in Parliament and in the press whether an attitude of benevolent aloofness was still the right attitude for Britain. Ought not the British Government, it was asked, to do something to break the deadlock? If legislation were required, ought not Parliament, still ultimately responsible for the welfare of India, to revoke its self-denying ordinance? If such questions remained unanswered, it was mainly because it was

easier to talk about making a move than to say what the move should be.

The call for a British initiative was not, of course, purely British. It had long been made in India; and in the spring of 1945 there were numerous Indian suggestions as to what it was the British Government should do. They came mainly from Hindu quarters, and they amounted broadly to a demand for action on the lines of the 'Cripps Offer'. The Conciliation Committee, for example—having tackled its formidable task so vigorously that it was able by the end of March to publish both its recommendations for an immediate or interim modification of the existing system and also an outline of its proposals for a permanent post-war constitution<sup>1</sup>—submitted (1) that the personnel of the Central Executive Council should forthwith be changed so that all its members, except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, should be Indian political leaders commanding the confidence of their parties in the Central Assembly, (2) that the control of expenditure on such 'reserved subjects' as foreign affairs and defence should be withdrawn from the Governor-General's 'discretion' and entrusted to the Legislature, and (3) that responsible government should be restored in the 'Section 93 Provinces', the Ministries being, as far as possible, coalitions of the major parties. Except for the proposed change in financial control these suggestions recalled the situation in the closing days of the Cripps Mission. The settlement, which then seemed almost within reach, contemplated just such an 'Indianisation' of the Executive Council, and the resumption of responsible government in the 'Section 93 Provinces' was regarded as its natural complement. It was not, as has been recorded, on that issue that the negotiations broke down, and the only real difficulty it presented—the question of communal representation on the Council and in the Provincial Ministries—seemed likely at the time to be overcome by an agreement on the Congress's part to accept an equal share of office at the Centre with the League and to form coalitions with the League in the Provinces. Nor did it seem that the settlement on those lines which had not been obtained in 1942 was unobtainable now. On the contrary there was more evidence now than there was then that the Congress was prepared to make the requisite concessions. Mr. Bhulabhai Desai, the leader of the Congress in the Central Assembly, stated later on that he approached Lord Wavell at this time with the suggestion that in an 'Indianised' Council forty per cent. of the seats should

<sup>1</sup> Conciliation Committee, Pamphlet No. 10 (April 1945).

be allotted to the Congress, forty per cent. to the League, and twenty per cent. to the other minority parties;<sup>1</sup> and the Conciliation Committee's recommendation that the restored Provincial Ministries should be coalitions was supported by the Congress press.

Mr. Gandhi's contribution to the discussion was not very positive or precise. Freedom, he said, might be won 'without parliamentary programmes and even without civil disobedience'.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Jinnah's contribution was wholly negative. In a statement to the press he repudiated the Conciliation Committee's proposals outright. 'They are nothing but handmaids of the Congress,' he said, 'and have played and are playing to the tune of Mr. Gandhi.'<sup>3</sup> It was thought, however, that he might be willing to consider the League's representation in an 'Indianised' Council on the 40-40-20 basis, since Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan, the deputy-leader of the League, was known to have discussed it with Mr. Bhulabhai Desai. But ever since the question was first raised in 1940 Mr. Jinnah has been cautious about accepting office at the Centre. He has evidently thought that it might prejudice the prospects of Pakistan to share in the working of the old unitary machine; and, even on its existing legal basis, he has always scouted the suggestion, now hinted at by the Conciliation Committee and expressly advocated by the Congress newspapers, that an interim 'Indianised' Council might be responsible *de facto*—it could not be *de jure* without a basic change in the law—to the old Central Assembly in which the Hindus possess a substantial majority. In other words, Mr. Jinnah may have been willing to contemplate a change in personnel but not in power. The latter, he would have said, is Mr. Gandhi's 'cart-before-the-horse' policy.

#### 4. THE SIMLA CONFERENCE

In Britain, meanwhile, the discussion of the Indian problem had been thrown into the background by the magnitude of current events in the West—the last phase of the war in Germany, the death of President Roosevelt, the preparations for San Francisco. But in distant India the possibility of ending the long deadlock was canvassed with a growing excitement which was further stimulated by Lord Wavell's visit to London towards the end of March and the official admission that political as well as military problems were to be discussed. Most of the Indian leaders gave voice and

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 17 May 1945.    <sup>2</sup> Reuter, Bombay, 31 March 1945.

<sup>3</sup> I. and B. Department, New Delhi, 3 April 1945.

were duly echoed by their party newspapers. Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru made haste to communicate his Committee's 'interim' recommendations to Lord Wavell and to publish the Resolutions on which its report on the new constitution was to be based. Mr. Jinnah cabled to the effect that Moslem India would resist any attempt to impose a new constitution without consultation with the League.<sup>1</sup> The President of the All-India Scheduled Castes Federation cabled that any settlement made 'at their sacrifice' would be opposed by all the means at their command.<sup>2</sup> Clearly there was a widespread belief in India that the purpose of the London discussions was not merely to break the deadlock by some readjustment of the existing constitutional system, but also to take the initiative with regard to a permanent settlement; and suggestions were forthcoming as to what the move should be. One interesting proposal was made by Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, a Moslem judge of the Federal Court, who was attending an unofficial conference on Commonwealth relations in London. The British Government, he said, should now formally declare that, if the major parties had not come to an agreement by the end of a year after the conclusion of the Japanese war, it would then itself frame and carry through Parliament a temporary constitution under which India would at once obtain a status of complete equality with the Dominions, and would maintain this constitution in force until the Indians should agree in framing one of their own.<sup>3</sup> But these protests and projects excited more interest in India than in England; for it was taken for granted in London that the discussions were not concerned with the permanent all-India settlement but only with the possibilities of an interim agreement for British India. The assumption was proved correct when on June 14 the British Government's proposals were published.<sup>4</sup> They may be summarised as follows:<sup>5</sup>

(1) The British Government cannot impose 'self-governing institutions upon an unwilling India'. As it declared in 1942, the new constitution must be framed by Indians; and it still hopes that they may be able to agree as to the method. Meantime it is anxious to do all it can under the existing constitution to secure the co-operation of all communities and sections of the Indian people in carrying on the war with Japan and in planning post-war

<sup>1</sup> Reuter, Bombay, 20 April 1945.    <sup>2</sup> Ibid., 23 April 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Institute of International Affairs, 19 February 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Lord Wavell returned to Delhi on 5 June and communicated the proposals to his Executive Council.

<sup>5</sup> For full text, see Document 4, p. 295 below.

economic development. (2) To that end it is proposed to reconstitute the Central Executive Council so that all its members, except the Governor-General and the Commander-in-Chief, would be Indian political leaders,<sup>1</sup> the Caste Hindus<sup>2</sup> and the Moslems being equally represented. The portfolio of External Affairs (except for frontier and tribal matters) would be transferred from the Governor-General to an Indian member of the Council, and fully accredited persons would be appointed to represent India abroad. (3) In furtherance of this plan Lord Wavell will call a conference of party leaders and Provincial Premiers and ex-Premiers who will be asked to submit to him lists of names from which he can select the personnel of the new Council. (4) Co-operation at the Centre will doubtless make possible the resumption of responsible government in the 'Section 93 Provinces', on the basis, it may be hoped, of coalitions of the main parties. (5) These proposals embody, in the British Government's opinion, 'the utmost progress practicable within the present constitution', and none of them 'will in any way prejudice or prejudice the essential form of the future permanent constitution or constitutions for India'.

In explaining these proposals to the House of Commons,<sup>3</sup> Mr. Amery stated that the eight members of the Congress Working Committee who were still in custody were to be released;<sup>4</sup> and he also announced that the Government intended to make an important administrative change. The Governor-General, he pointed out, might possibly be embarrassed on occasion by his 'dual position of being concerned as head of the Government of India with the defence of Indian interests and at the same time of representing the specific material interests of this country'. It had been decided, therefore, to appoint a British High Commissioner in India to negotiate on the British Government's behalf in such matters—one more proof of the measure of self-government already attained by India.

It was as a means not only of breaking the existing deadlock

<sup>1</sup> This, as explained in the statement, would require a small amendment of the Ninth Schedule to the Act of 1935, which requires that not less than three members of the Council should have had at least ten years' service under the Crown in India.

<sup>2</sup> The use of this term was vehemently denounced by Mr. Gandhi who has always sought to minimise the distinction between the 'outcastes' (*harijans*) and the rest of the Hindu community: but the term has long been in common use to describe those Hindus who are not 'outcastes'.

<sup>3</sup> *Hansard*, H. of C., ccccx, 1837-45.

<sup>4</sup> The other seven had been released mostly on grounds of health at various times since 1942.



but also of promoting a permanent settlement that Mr. Amery commended the proposals. 'We are placing India's immediate future in Indian hands,' he said. 'It is the utmost that we ourselves can do pending Indian agreement on a final constitutional settlement. We believe, however, that, if the offer is accepted, the co-operation of Indian statesmen in facing the many practical and urgent issues of India's needs, may help to bring the hour of agreement nearer.' Lastly, he explained—and it was confirmed by Mr. Attlee—that, though the British Government had recently ceased to be the coalition it had been since 1940, the new move was not a party move. Lord Wavell had fully consulted the previous Cabinet of which the Labour leaders were members, and the proposals represented 'an agreed national offer on the part of this country to the people of India'.

Broadcasting from Delhi at the same time as Mr. Amery was speaking at Westminster, Lord Wavell also stressed the point that the proposals looked to the future as well as to the present. 'I want to make it quite clear that neither I nor His Majesty's Government have lost sight of the need for a long-term solution and that the present proposals are intended to make a long-term solution easier.' Behind them, he went on, was 'a most genuine desire on the part of all responsible leaders in the United Kingdom and of the British people as a whole to help India towards her goal'.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Wavell promptly issued invitations to a Conference at Simla. Only two of the twenty-two persons invited—the most important two—made any difficulty about acceptance. Mr. Gandhi denied, as usual, that he could represent the Congress: though he would come to Simla, he could not attend the Conference.<sup>2</sup> He asked, and Lord Wavell agreed, that Maulana A. K. Azad should be invited instead. Mr. Jinnah protested against this show of aloofness on Mr. Gandhi's part and asked for a short postponement of the date. In the event all the persons invited except Mr. Gandhi assembled at the Viceregal Lodge on June 25. They included the Premiers or ex-Premiers of the eleven Provinces—five of whom were members of the Congress and three of the League<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 15 June 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gandhi finally defined his status as follows. 'I have for years been advising Congress. But now I have constituted myself both adviser to Congress and adviser too to the Viceroy and through him to the British people.' I. and B. Dept., New Delhi, 30 June 1945.

<sup>3</sup> Mr. C. Rajagopalachari (ex-Premier of Madras) left the Congress in 1942 (see p. 219 above) and Malik Khizer Hyat Khan (Premier of the Punjab) was expelled from the League in 1945 (see p. 234 above).

—the Presidents of the Congress and the League, the Congress Leader and the League Deputy-Leader in the Central Assembly (Mr. Bhulabhai Desai and Nawabzada Liaquat Ali Khan), the Congress and League Leaders in the Council of State, the Leaders of the Nationalist Party and of the European group in the Assembly, and one representative of the Scheduled Castes and one of the Sikhs. The preponderance of the Congress and the League in this list was manifest, and the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians protested against their exclusion.<sup>1</sup> But, apart from the desirability of keeping the personnel as small as possible, it was a realistic selection; for it had long been evident that there would be no serious obstacle to a general settlement if only the Congress and the League agreed.

In the short speech with which Lord Wavell opened the Conference, he reaffirmed his hope that its outcome would pave the way to a final solution of the complex constitutional problem. 'You must accept my leadership for the present. Until there is some agreed change in the constitution, I am responsible to His Majesty's Government for the good government and welfare of India. I ask you to believe in me as a sincere friend of India.'<sup>2</sup>

Opinion at the outset was optimistic, and not, perhaps, without reason. For the great party which had done most to prevent agreement in the past was now bent, it seemed, on obtaining it. This was a striking change of front. For the 'Wavell Offer' was essentially the same as the interim proposals of the 'Cripps Offer', and acceptance of it would imply that the Congress was now willing to share in the Central Government without a basic change in the existing constitution and to take its full part in the war effort—the two points on which the rupture had occurred in 1942. It would mean, in fact, that the Congress leaders now concurred with the general opinion that the 'Quit India' policy was a mistake and were seeking to recover the ground they had lost thereby in the judgment of their fellow countrymen and of the world at large.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Rajagopalachari claimed, indeed, during the session of the Conference, that 'goodwill and mutual trust' between the Congress and the British people had been 'to a large extent' restored.<sup>4</sup> But,

<sup>1</sup> *The Times*, 26 June 1945.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> After the breakdown of the Conference, Mr. Vallabhbhai Patel, an influential member of the Congress Working Committee, said: 'Some people have made the charge that Congress avoided assuming responsibility. We have proved it is a false charge. We have also put ourselves right before world opinion.' *I. and B. Dept.*, New Delhi, 18 July 1945.

<sup>4</sup> *Statesman*, 4 July 1945.

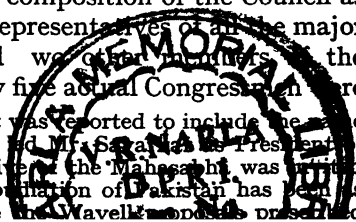
desirable as this might be, it was a secondary consideration. The first thing needed to enable India to obtain her full freedom was—as it still is—a Hindu-Moslem or, more specifically, a Congress-League understanding. And unhappily, for many years past, any suggestion of a *rapprochement* between the Congress and the British Government has always revived the old anxiety in Moslem minds lest the British should be induced to acquiesce in the establishment of a Hindu Raj.

Thus, before the Conference opened, there was no mistaking where the real issue lay. It was plainly not a question, as it was in the days of the Cripps Mission, of the measure of power to be transferred to Indians, but only of its distribution among them. And, at an early stage of the proceedings, it became clear that the issue was even narrower than that. It was agreed that some seats on the new Council should be allotted to the Scheduled Castes and Sikhs and possibly other minorities; and it was not contested that the Moslems were to have as many seats as the Caste Hindus. The point in dispute was who those Moslems were to be.

It came to a head when on June 29 Maulana Azad and Mr. Jinnah, who had been in close contact with their Working Committees assembled at Simla, reported their failure to agree as to the strength and composition of the Council. The Conference was thereupon adjourned till July 14 for further informal consultation, and Lord Wavell asked the party leaders to provide him with lists of names, not necessarily confined to members of their own parties, from which he might select, on his own responsibility, the personnel of the new Council. Lord Wavell's sincerity was evidently unquestioned. Was it too much to hope that he might be able to draw up a list which, though it might not satisfy all claims in full, could eventually be accepted as a reasonably fair arrangement?

With the exception of Mr. Jinnah and the leader of the European group (who held that the lists should be tendered by Indians only), the leaders of all the parties represented at the Conference duly submitted their lists. It was understood that the Congress list was, in effect, a recommendation for the composition of the Council as a whole; that it therefore included representatives of all the major parties, including Mr. Jinnah and two other Muslims, the League;<sup>1</sup> and that the names of only five actual Congressmen were

<sup>1</sup> Reuter, Simla, 7 July 1945. The list was reported to include the name of Dr. S. P. Mookerjee, who has succeeded Mr. Savarkar as President of the Hindu Mahasabha. No representative of the Mahasabha was invited to the Conference. Dr. Mookerjee's reputation of Pakistan has been as truculent as Mr. Savarkar's, and, since the Wavell proposals presented



submitted, two of whom, however, were Maulana Azad and Mr. Asaf Ali. Maulana Azad himself made it clear that the inclusion of those two last-named Moslems in the Congress panel was a matter of principle. The Congress, he said, is 'essentially a national organisation, and it cannot possibly be a party to any arrangement, howsoever temporary it may be, that prejudices its national character, tends to impair the growth of nationalism, and reduces Congress directly or indirectly to a communal body'.<sup>1</sup> It was not to be expected that the Congress, though its composition is overwhelmingly Hindu, should abandon its traditional claim to be the one super-communal party; but it might be argued that, if all Congressmen were communally neutral, it did not matter vitally to which communities its representatives on the Council belonged; and the occupation of any places in the Moslem quota by Congress Moslems was bound to be resisted by the League. Though the position was not the same as it was after the first Provincial elections under the Act of 1935, though the Council was to be an inter-party Coalition, though the leaders of the League were on the Congress list, nevertheless the reassertion of the Congress claim inevitably reminded Moslems of what happened in 1937. It was on that same claim that the decision to form 'pure' Congress Ministries in the 'Congress Provinces' was based—the decision which set the Moslems on the path towards Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> Congressmen might, it is true, have protested that there was no longer any fear of that. 'Was not their willingness to take part in the Conference', they might say, 'a proof that the old talk about "taking delivery" and "a Congress Raj" belonged as much to the past as "Quit India"?' The proposed new Council was to be a Coalition, and no one had suggested that the Congress was to have the majority of the seats in it.' But to that the League, no doubt, would have replied: 'But we are only considering an interim arrangement. Does the Congress plan for a great Constituent Assembly to determine a permanent constitution for all India by majority vote also belong to the past?'<sup>3</sup> You can only still our fears, you can only

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Hindu-Moslem parity in the Council, his Working Committee denounced them as intended 'to break the solidarity of the Indian nation' and declared that the plan would be 'resisted by all possible means', even if it were accepted by the Conference. *Reuter, Poona, 26 June 1945.*

<sup>1</sup> Associated Press, Simla, 14 July 1945. Pandit Nehru is reported to have said a few days later: 'Congress has a national foundation. Its doors are open to all. It is now impossible for Congress to shift from that foundation. If it does so, it will die.' Associated Press, Lahore, 17 July 1945.

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 181-3 above.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 170 above.

obtain our agreement, if you concede us Pakistan: and that you will not do.'

The Congress claim to include Moslems in its party list was not the only difficulty. The Premier of the Punjab and leader of the Unionist Party was a member of the Conference, and he was understood to have asked that one of the Moslem seats should be allotted to his own Province. Not long ago most Moslem Unionists were also members of the League, but the quarrel between Mr. Jinnah and the Premier had forced the two parties apart.<sup>1</sup> Here, then, was a second point of conflict with the League, and a point of more immediate practical importance than the first. The primary task of the new Council would be to finish the war with Japan, and the Punjab Moslems rank second to none in the record of the Indian Army. Was it possible that the Council should contain no representative of the party which commanded the majority of Moslem votes in the Punjab Legislature and manned most of the Punjab Ministry?

Persistent attempts were made, not least by Lord Wavell, to overcome these difficulties by private discussion. To what extent, if any, the other parties concerned were willing to abate their claims is unknown, but Mr. Jinnah made no secret of his uncompromising stand. He declined to submit a list on the League's behalf without an assurance that all the Moslem members of the Council would be members of the League. So, when the Conference met again on July 14, Lord Wavell announced its breakdown.<sup>2</sup> All the parties, he said, had submitted lists except the League, and, as a last resort, he had made his own provisional selection, including representatives of the League.

My selections would, I think, have given a balanced and efficient Executive Council, whose composition would have been reasonably fair to all parties. I did not find it possible, however, to accept the claims of any party in full. When I explained my selection to Mr. Jinnah, he told me that it was not acceptable to the Moslem League, and he was so decided that I felt it would be useless to continue the discussions. . . . The Conference has therefore failed. Nobody can regret this more than I do myself. . . . I cannot place the blame for its failure on any of the parties. I ask party leaders to accept this view and to do all they can to ensure that there are no recriminations. It is of the utmost importance that this effort to secure agreement between the parties and communities should not result in a worsening of communal feeling. . . . I propose to take a little time to consider in what way I can best help

<sup>1</sup> See p. 234 above.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 16 July 1945.

India after the failure of the Conference. . . . Do not any of you be discouraged by this set-back. We shall overcome our difficulties in the end. The future greatness of India is not in doubt.

It was too much, perhaps, to expect that there would be no recriminations. Hindu newspapers pinned the responsibility for the breakdown on Mr. Jinnah or on Lord Wavell for not overriding Mr. Jinnah. 'By allowing the right to dictate success or failure', said the *Hindustan Times*, 'Lord Wavell has nullified all his previous firmness and tact. . . . A National Government without the League need not and should not involve any injury to the Muslim community. . . . The only course is to leave the League alone for the present and allow the good sense of the Muslim community to bring pressure upon it to change its ways.'<sup>1</sup> Moslem newspapers were equally uncompromising, and, just as the Congress leaders, after rejecting the 'Cripps Offer', had asserted that it was a cynical plot and a 'salted mine',<sup>2</sup> so now Mr. Jinnah declared that 'on the final examination and analysis of the Wavell Plan we found that it was a snare.'<sup>3</sup> But, though Mr. Jinnah would thus seemingly admit the chief share of responsibility for the breakdown of the Conference, it does not follow that his case was so weak, his intransigence so unreasonable, as to have made it possible for Lord Wavell to override it. His case was frankly stated to the press, both during and after the Conference, and impartial students of Indian politics must judge it on its merits. In sum it was as follows.

(1) The fact that the Moslem League is backed by the great majority of Indian Moslems is proved by the number of Moslem seats it holds in the Legislatures and by the consistent results of by-elections. (2) The policy of the League is Pakistan or the Partition of India. Since 1940, therefore, the League had refused to join a Central Government unless the British Government promised Partition after the war and unless the Moslems, being a separate nation, were given half the seats on the Council. (3) The League could not be expected to waive the first of these conditions if the second were also rejected; and it was now proposed that, beside the equal quotas allotted to the Moslems and the Caste Hindus, a number of seats should be filled by representatives of other communities.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Moslems would be in a minority. (4) While those other communities—the Scheduled Castes, for

<sup>1</sup> I. and B. Dept., New Delhi, 11 and 14 July 1945.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 218 above.

<sup>3</sup> *The Times*, 16 July 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Jinnah stated that the 'Wavell Plan' contemplated a Moslem quota of one-third.

example, or the Sikhs—might differ from the Caste Hindus on other issues, they would agree with them on the cardinal question of Partition; and, since the policy of the Council is determined by majority vote, it would—in such matters, for instance, as long-term economic planning—take the maintenance of the unity of India for granted. (5) Thus, despite the explicit assurance given in the British proposals, the settlement of 'the future permanent constitution or constitutions' would in fact be prejudiced; and the League could scarcely be expected to take this risk if the only safeguard lay in the possibility of the Governor-General's veto being exercised in its favour. (6) To acquiesce, moreover, in the inclusion of non-League Moslems in the Moslem quota would be interpreted as an admission that the small section of Moslem opinion which did not back the League was much more substantial than the polls had shown it to be.<sup>1</sup> 'Had we agreed, we should have signed our death-warrant.'

The moral of Simla was plain. The future dominates the present. The major communities cannot agree on any interim change in the existing system of government until they are agreed about the main principles of the future permanent system. There can be no real progress, in fact, no real breaking of the deadlock, until the responsible spokesmen of Indian opinion discuss and determine the shape of things to come.

It seems now (September 1945) that this is likely to happen sooner than was expected a short time ago. Both the 'August Offer' and the 'Cripps Offer' postponed the constitutional settlement till the war was over, and in India it was the war with Japan more than the war with Germany and Italy that ruled out any unnecessary distraction from the immediate task first of defence and then of victory. Now that obstacle is down, and the British Government has decided to put into effect without delay a scheme for the drafting of a constitution similar to that which was proposed in 1942.

The first step will be the holding of the general elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures which have not been held in the one case since 1934 and in the other since 1937. As announced by Lord Wavell on August 21, they will be held in the course of the coming 'cold weather'. Elections will, it is hoped, be followed by the restoration of responsible government in the Provinces in

<sup>1</sup> *Dawn*, 30 June; I. and B. Dept., New Delhi, 7 and 16 July; *The Times*, 16 July 1945.

which it has been suspended; but it must be remembered that Congress leaders have pointed out the difficulty of operating responsible government in the Provinces while government is not responsible at the Centre and that Mr. Jinnah has repeatedly declared that he would never acquiesce in the return to office of 'pure' Congress Ministries in the Congress-majority Provinces. But, if coalition Ministries can be formed—and it has been suggested more than once in Congress circles that this is the right policy—the way will be clear for devising and convoking a Constitutional Convention.

It was mainly, no doubt, to discuss the question of this Convention with the new Labour Government that Lord Wavell paid a second visit to London at the end of August. The upshot of it was made known, soon after his return to Delhi, in a broadcast to the Indian people (September 19).<sup>1</sup> He had been authorised, he said, immediately after the elections, to discuss with representatives of the new Provincial Assemblies whether the proposals of 1945 for the setting-up of a constitution-making body were acceptable<sup>2</sup> or whether some alternative plan might be preferred, and also to discuss with representatives of the Indian States how they can best play their part. The British Government on its side would consider forthwith the content of the treaty which, as stated in 1942, would have to be concluded between Britain and India.<sup>3</sup> He would also, after the elections, make another attempt to reconstitute his Executive Council. He concluded the broadcast with an assurance of the British people's desire 'to help India which has given us so much help in winning the war', and with an appeal to Indians 'to show that they have the wisdom, faith, and courage to determine in what way they can best reconcile their differences, and how their country can be governed by Indians for Indians'.

So far, so good, but, in view of all that has happened in recent years, what chance is there, it may be asked, that Indian discussion will result in Indian agreement? And would it not help to bring about agreement, it has been said, if the British Government were to impose a time-limit? If it pledged itself to abdicate, to surrender all its remaining powers, at a certain date—at the end of

<sup>1</sup> For full text see Document No. 5, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> For these proposals, see *Report*, II, 337, and for arguments in favour of a smaller Convention, III, 35-7.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 214 above.



two years, perhaps, or three—would not that compel the Indian parties to come to terms with one another before the time was up?

There can be little doubt about the answer to that question. No such pledge can be given because, if it failed to achieve its purpose, it would not be kept. If there were no agreement when the period of grace had elapsed, if no new constitution had been framed and no new Indian Government formed, the British Government could not abdicate. It could not surrender its powers if there was nobody to take them over. It would mean immediate chaos. It would also mean the betrayal of obligations which the British Government is bound to fulfil.<sup>1</sup>

These difficulties would be met if, in accordance with Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan's suggestion, the British Government, at the expiry of the time-limit, were to put into force at least a temporary constitution of its own framing. But could it do so? In a sense, no doubt, it imposed the existing constitution, but the wide measure of Indian assent or acquiescence in the Act of 1935 is not to be expected now. Moreover, the very basis of the settlement, the territorial ground on which it is to rest, is now in dispute.<sup>2</sup> In 1935 the unity of India was taken for granted by all parties. In 1945 Partition is the cardinal issue of Indian politics; and, if the bulk of the Moslems should persist in their rejection of a united India, could the British Government withdraw the option of 'non-accession' offered in 1942 and impose it on them? Or could it disrupt India in the face of bitter Hindu opposition? And, apart from this dominant issue, could any constitution be in fact imposed? It could not be imposed on Indian India without tearing up the treaties. In British India the Act of 1935 secured at least the acquiescence of all Indian parties save the Congress; but the Congress's refusal to work the Provincial part of it has alone been enough to prevent that part from being worked at all, save under its emergency clauses, in several Provinces. The League, if it were so minded, could probably bring about the same result in some, if not all, of the Moslem-majority Provinces. In fact, no constitution based on the principles of popular government can operate without popular consent; and the notion of imposing such a constitution in the sense of enforcing it becomes a double paradox when it is remembered that the immediate purpose of the constitution is to

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 280-5 below.

<sup>2</sup> This was pointed out by Lord Hailey, who was closely concerned with the framing of the Act: *The Times*, 27 March 1945.

enable the people of India to govern themselves as fully as any other people in the world.<sup>1</sup>

It does not follow that the British people are disinterested. The future of India, it need hardly be said, cannot be a matter of indifference to those who have been so closely concerned with her past. Nor is it only a question of sentiment or of material considerations: the discharge of British obligations is an essential factor in the final settlement. For these and many other reasons a larger section of the British public is interested in the Indian problem than at any time within living memory. They will closely watch developments in India, and they will be anxious to do anything they can to help India to her freedom. And it seems just possible that there might ultimately be something they could do. If the worst comes to the worst, if in the end the Indian leaders fail to agree, or if they find themselves impelled towards a decision which they feel in their hearts to be wrong, is it not conceivable that in the last resort they might be willing at least to consider such constructive suggestions as might be tendered by those neutrals who know and care more about India than any one else in the outer world. The British Government cannot *impose*, but it could, at need, *propose* a settlement.

<sup>1</sup> This point was made in the Wavell Proposals: see p. 295 below.

## II

# Possibilities of a Settlement

### I. UNION OR PARTITION

IT was pointed out in the last chapter that the task of drafting a new Indian constitution cannot be begun until the territorial field in which it is to operate has been determined. Is it to provide a framework of government maintaining in some form and in some degree the political unity of India or is it to deal with two or more separate sovereign States? Mr. Jinnah maintains that it is needless to ask that question, that the Moslems have already answered it, that the problem of India's future can only be solved by its partition into predominantly Moslem and Hindu States as completely severed from each other as China from Japan. He may prove right. What has happened in Ireland, in different circumstances and on a very much smaller scale, may happen in India. Nor is it inconceivable that such a settlement might be a settlement by consent. Mr. Gandhi has discussed it. Maulana Azad and Pandit Nehru have declared that the Moslems in Moslem-majority areas cannot be dragged into an all-India union against their will. And, though the main forces of Hindu nationalism are still fiercely opposed to it, they might feel obliged to concede it if in the end it should seem to be the only way out of the *impasse*, the only path to freedom. But such a consent would not be willing: it would be a surrender to the force of circumstances: and the bitter resentment it would leave in Hindu minds would augur ill for the future peace of India. All serious students of the Indian problem are bound, therefore, to consider the possibilities of dealing with it otherwise. It may assist that process to state, as concisely as may be, the two sides of the issue at stake—the case for maintaining the unity of India and the case for disrupting it.

The case for Union must be prefaced by two observations. First, it is a question of maintaining it, not creating it. Since 1848, close upon a century, the whole of India has been combined in a single political union in which British Provinces and Indian Principalities have been administered under the ultimate control or suzerainty of a single political authority. Thus Partition would be destructive, not constructive. It would correspond to what would have happened to the American Commonwealth if the result of the Civil War had been the reverse of what it was. Secondly,

Partition would not be one clean cut. The two Moslem-majority areas in north-west and north-east India might be linked in one federal system, but they would be separated from each other by over 700 miles of Hindu-majority territory. Nor can it be assumed that the process of disruption would stop there. Already a movement is afoot in Madras for establishing an independent Dravidian state in the south; and it seems probable that some at least of the leading Indian Princes, while willing to share in a union of all India, would refuse to be incorporated in any lesser unit and demand an independent status of their own.

Set against such a fragmentation of India the merits of political unity seem obvious enough.

(1) It is the natural response to physical conditions. Mountains and the sea cut off India from the rest of the world, but not the various parts of India from one another. In sharp and significant contrast with Europe, the coastline of India is remarkably unbroken, and the only natural barrier inside it is easily surmountable by modern transport.

(2) Union means security. It enables India to mobilise all her resources for the common defence of her common frontiers against aggression from without. Within, there can be no war save civil war. Union, imposed by the British Raj, rescued India from centuries of invasion and internal strife: for nearly another century it has saved her from suffering the fate of war-ridden Europe: it gives her now a far greater measure of stability and security than Europe can hope to attain for many years to come.

(3) Union similarly reflects the natural economic unity of India. British India has long constituted one of the greatest free-trade areas in the world. If the Indian States were linked with it in a new form of union, the whole sub-continent would be safeguarded against the economic nationalism which inflamed and impoverished Europe before 1939.

(4) Union involves intercommunal collaboration in its service; and it may well be that it is only by the communal leaders and parties thus working together in a common field that the old antagonisms and suspicions can be blunted and in course of time dissolved.

(5) Union, finally, would enable India to take the place in world society to which she is entitled by her size, her material and moral resources, and her historical and cultural traditions. A United

States of India might become the leading power in Asia and rank with the great Powers of the West.

The case for Partition, as advanced by its chief exponents, may be summarised as follows.

(1) India is not one nation in which the hundred million Moslems constitute a minority-community. The Moslems are so different from the Hindus that they are a separate nation; and, like other nations, they possess a national homeland—the Moslem-majority areas in north-west and north-east India—and are entitled to the same equal status as other nations and to the same right of national self-determination.

(2) Partition alone can solve the Hindu-Moslem problem, since it is the only means by which the Moslems can escape the domination of the Hindu majority. It is the prospect of a Hindu Raj which has deepened the Hindu-Moslem schism, and only the Moslems' acquisition of a separate sovereignty can resolve the complex of pride and fear which that prospect has inspired. Moslem rights may seem safe in the Moslem-majority Provinces, but the Central control of all-India 'subjects', however few they might be, would extend to those Provinces and it would be predominantly Hindu control. Therefore there must be no Centre.

(3) Partition would assuage the Moslems' pride by making them the masters of two substantial States. 'Pakistan'—comprising Sind, the Punjab, the N.W.F. Province, and British Baluchistan—would cover about 170,000 square miles (rather less than Iraq) and contain over 36 million people. 'North-east India' would cover about 130,000 square miles and contain about 58 million people.<sup>1</sup> Established in these States, the Indian Moslems would acquire their natural footing in the world, liberated from subjection to the alien Hindus and linked on equal terms with the States of the Middle East in the brotherhood of Islam—an association which incidentally would ease the problem of defence on the north-west frontier.

(4) Partition would likewise allay the Moslems' fear lest, if they continue to live in one State with the Hindus when the last vestiges of neutral British control have been removed, they will be doomed for ever to the status of a subordinate minority in politics, in economics, in administration, in education. The character of their separate State or States, however fairly their communal minorities

<sup>1</sup> For these and other details, see *Report*, Part III, p. 80 ff.

might be treated, would be essentially Moslem. Their governments, their civil and military services, their educational systems, would be predominantly Moslem. They would be able to ensure the maximum of economic development free from the stranglehold of Hindu financiers and industrialists. Last but not least, Partition would dispel the dread that lurks in Moslem minds lest, in the slow course of time, their faith itself might be gradually infected and overgrown by Hinduism.

(5) Partition would not only strengthen and safeguard the Moslems in their homelands. The existence of a powerful Moslem State would also improve the standing and enhance the self-respect of the Moslem minorities who would perforce be left outside its borders, encompassed by Hindus. It would help them to claim and obtain their rights and to resist the moral pressure of Hinduism.<sup>1</sup>

The difficulties and drawbacks of Partition may be summarised as follows.

(1) The demarcation of the frontiers would be a serious and thorny problem for both the two projected Moslem States. The bulk of the Sikh community is located in the Punjab and in the Punjab States, and the Sikh reaction to the prospect of a Moslem Raj in Pakistan closely corresponds to the Moslem reaction to the prospect of a Hindu Raj in an undivided India. But the exclusion of the Sikhs from Pakistan presents an almost insoluble administrative problem and would greatly impair its military and economic strength.<sup>2</sup> In North-east India the problem of delimitation would be scarcely easier. The Moslems number about sixty per cent. of the population of the area as a whole, but only about thirty-four per cent. in Assam. Can Assam's assent to inclusion in a Moslem State be taken for granted? It is suggested, again, that the Hindu-majority districts of western Bengal might be transferred to the adjacent Hindu State, but might not that provoke a similar outburst of Bengali patriotism among the Hindus as that which greeted the partition of the Province in 1905 and led to its undoing in 1911? What, finally, is to happen to Calcutta—a city which contains three times as many Hindus as Moslems and whose great commercial and cultural interests are dominantly Hindu? It has long been a focus of communal antagonism. Can it be quietly cut

<sup>1</sup> See *Report*, Part III, pp. 79–80.

<sup>2</sup> For the suggested exclusion of the Hindu-majority Ambala Division, see *Report*, Part III, pp. 81–4

off from Hindu India and become the metropolis of a Moslem State?<sup>1</sup>

(2) Partition would greatly modify the character of the Hindu-Moslem problem in India, but the claim that it would solve it cannot stand. A large-scale exchange of population between the Moslem and Hindu States would be quite impracticable, and of the 80 million Moslems now in British India some 20 million would remain in 'Hindustan' and of the 150 million Caste Hindus some 30 million would remain in Pakistan and North-east India. Would not this inevitably foster, on both sides of each frontier, the 'irredentism' which has done so much to wreck the peace of Europe?

(3) The Moslems would have to pay a high price for Partition. Pakistan, astride the natural economic unit of the Indus basin and with a doorway to the outer world at Karachi, could certainly pay its way,<sup>2</sup> but it could not bear by itself the share of the cost of defending the north-west frontier now borne by British India as a whole and at the same time improve its social services and raise its standard of living or even maintain them at their present level.<sup>2</sup> It seems an improbable assumption that the Hindus would facilitate a Partition they detest by undertaking to co-operate in the defence of the frontier and to continue to bear a proportionate share of its cost. On the contrary, might not Pakistan conceivably have to safeguard not only its north-west but also its south-east flank? The financial prospects of North-east India are more speculative because its boundaries are more uncertain; but one thing is sure—without Calcutta North-east India would be desperately poor and weak.

(4) The remaining drawbacks to Partition are the converse of the case for Union, and they apply to all Indians, not to the Moslems only. It would rob India of the supreme, the one unquestioned, boon which British rule has given her. It would convert the whole sub-continent into a complex of rival quasi-national sovereignties, walled off from one another by political and economic frontiers. India, in fact, would be 'Balkanised'; and, instead of being a peaceful and stable element in the new international structure, it might well become, like the Balkans in the past, a breeding-ground of world-war. Nor could the peoples of a disrupted India take their due place among other peoples. Their States would rank not

<sup>1</sup> For details, see *Report*, Part III, pp. 88-9.

<sup>2</sup> The relevant financial calculations will be found in *Report*, Part III, pp. 91-8, 189-203.

with China or the Powers of the West, but with Iran or Burma or Siam.

Those are formidable drawbacks, and yet it seems more than probable that the great majority of the Moslems in their present mood would choose to face them and endure them rather than submit to a Hindu Raj in any shape or form. It behoves, then, all those who care for India's welfare—and indeed for the welfare of the world-society of which India is an inseparable part—to think, and think again, whether some constitutional system might not be devised which would meet the practical and emotional needs of the Moslems without completely shattering the unity of India.

## 2. THE PROVINCES

To deal first with the Provinces is not to prejudge the problem of the Centre. Whether India is partitioned or not, the Provinces, possibly with some local adjustments of their frontiers, will remain as basic territorial units of administration. It is only the scope of their autonomy that affects the Central problem; and the question to be examined in this section is not what a Province's powers should be but how they should be exercised. This question has been at least as much discussed in India, both publicly and behind the scenes, as the Central question, especially with regard to the possible restoration of responsible government in the 'Section 93 Provinces'; and, now that opinions about it have begun to settle, a stretch of common ground is seen to be taking shape.

Of the proposals that have so far been made, the following are the most important.

(1) The constitution should contain a declaration of fundamental rights applying to the Central and Provincial field alike, and guaranteeing to communities and individuals the freedoms which must be respected in any modern civilised society. These rights should be so defined as to facilitate as far as possible their maintenance in the courts.

(2) Since the surest safeguard of the peace of India will be the sovereignty of the law, the constitution must be regarded as peculiarly sacrosanct and permanent. It should be subject to amendment only by special processes and by special majorities.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Conciliation Committee recommended that the constitution should be subject to amendment only by the vote of at least two-thirds of each chamber of the Central Legislature and of the Legislature of each unit of the Union.



(3) General assent to these first two proposals may be taken for granted; and at least a substantial measure of support may be expected for the proposal that further protection to minorities might be afforded by the establishment of a Minorities Commission in each Province (and at the Centre), charged with the duty of watching minority interests, with particular reference to the maintenance of those of their rights which could not be made justiciable.<sup>1</sup>

(4) As regards the composition of the Legislatures, no one has suggested that communal representation can be dispensed with. It is apparently agreed that the reservation of seats, with or without 'weightage', must continue. The point in dispute is still the old point of separate electorates, and the strength of Hindu sentiment thereon was clearly displayed in the proceedings of the Conciliation Committee. For, in making its most striking recommendation (to be recorded later on) for a Hindu-Moslem accord—an equal footing for Hindus and Moslems at the Centre—it insisted that this concession could only be made by the Hindus if the Moslems agreed to surrender separate electorates. Unhappily, if there are any certainties in the present flux of Indian politics, the determination of the Moslems to retain separate electorates is one of them.<sup>2</sup> It would seem, indeed, that a general acceptance of joint electorates of the normal democratic type should be regarded not as a means to communal conciliation and co-operation but as their eventual result; and, if a settlement on all other points were within reach, it is hard to believe that the Hindus would choose to wreck it on that one alone.

(5) The continuance of the quota system for maintaining a communal balance in the personnel of the administrative services seems also to be accepted, though with natural reluctance on the part of those who hold that merit and efficiency should be the sole considerations.

(6) Last and most important is the question of the composition of the Executive—most important because the minorities realise that the best safeguard against the abuse of power in communal matters is communal participation in its exercise. The old dispute on this paramount issue between those who asserted and those who

<sup>1</sup> The latest version of this proposal is that of the Conciliation Committee which recommended that the Commissions should draw up periodical reports for submission to and discussion by the Legislatures.

<sup>2</sup> Sir Chimanlal Setalvad, the veteran Hindu Liberal, while deploring the undemocratic character of separate electorates, expressed the opinion that it was quite certain that the Moslems would refuse to surrender them at present. Press telegram, New Delhi, 11 April 1945.

denied that the British parliamentary tradition of one-party majority rule could be successfully adopted in India came to a head in 1937, and it has become clear since then that communal representation in the Legislature is illogical and ineffective unless it is reflected in the Executive. It is an encouraging portent that the Conciliation Committee should have favoured Coalition Ministries in its interim proposals, and still more encouraging that the Congress press should have supported it.<sup>1</sup>

(7) There remains the question of the relations between the Executive and the Legislature. More than one Hindu publicist in the course of the last few years has argued that on this point again the British model is not the best for India, and that it would promote the stability of Governments and discourage the constant stimulation of communal antagonism as a means of attacking them if they were not dependent for their maintenance of office on the day-to-day support of the Legislature but, as in Switzerland, were elected by the Legislature for the duration of its life.<sup>2</sup> This again is one of the Conciliation Committee's recommendations for the Centre, and it is clearly no less applicable to the Provinces.

It appears from this summary survey that a substantial consensus of opinion has been quietly forming itself as regards the Provincial part of the constitutional settlement. It is not, in fact, too much to say that a scheme of Provincial self-government is already in sight in which the minorities may be reasonably expected to acquiesce. Here, at any rate, the deadlock has plainly begun to loosen; and the prospects of a general settlement would be bright indeed if the major crux lay in the Provincial field. But the major crux has always been and still is at the Centre.

### 3. THE CENTRE

At the Centre, as in the Provinces, the primary problem is communal. Partition would resolve it by abolishing the Centre; but is there nothing short of Partition which might conceivably meet the Moslems' twofold claim—to be freed from a Hindu Raj and

<sup>1</sup> The formation of a 'pure' Congress Ministry in the N.W.F.P. need not be construed as a relapse to the standpoint of 1937. Cabinet-making in that peculiar Province is more a matter of persons than of principles, and coalitions can scarcely be a communal question for a population of which over ninety-two per cent. belong to one community.

<sup>2</sup> For this provision in the Swiss Constitution, see *Report*, Part III pp. 67-9. It does not mean that the Executive would be free from all control. The Legislature could reject its measures and refuse supply.

to establish their status as a separate 'nation' in their own 'homelands'?

Plainly, to begin with, it would be futile to try to maintain the high degree of unity imposed on British India<sup>1</sup> by the British Raj. In principle, no doubt, the more united India is, the better it will be for her; but the same might be said of Europe or indeed of the world as a whole; and India, like other countries, must perforce content herself with what is practicable.

Is a Federation on the lines of the Act of 1935 practicable? Evidently not. It has been unreservedly repudiated by Mr. Jinnah and the League, because it clashes with both sides of the Moslem case. The Federation projected in 1935 purported to do what all existing Federations do—to combine the principle of local variety and autonomy with the principle of a single nationhood. While, therefore, it allotted a wide field of power to the Provinces, it constructed a Centre which was to embody the sense of national unity in all India and to secure and stimulate its further growth. Like all other Federations, it extended the scope of Central authority well beyond what might be regarded as the irreducible minimum required for any Centre; and, as in all other Federations, the Legislature was so composed as broadly to reflect the character of the Indian people as a whole. It was thus inevitable that, while minority claims were to be recognised by communal representation and 'weightage', the Hindus should possess a majority in the Legislature. Of the representatives of British India in the lower house, forty-two per cent. were to be Caste Hindus, and thirty-three per cent. Moslems. It was intended that the Executive should be responsible to the Legislature and that its communal composition should be roughly the same.

If the Moslems are to be induced to acquiesce in any sort of Federation, it is clearly necessary to contemplate a very different kind of Centre—different in its powers, its composition and its purpose.

As regards the scope of the Centre's authority, the Hindu unitary doctrine, a natural doctrine though it is for a community which contains three-fifths of the Indian people, must be abandoned. A Centre acceptable to present-day Moslem opinion must be 'minimal'. Those moderate-minded Moslems, who have not echoed Mr. Jinnah's 'No Centre at all', have still insisted that the powers of any Centre must be confined to the smallest practicable

<sup>1</sup> This section is concerned with British India only: the position of the Indian States will be discussed in the next section.

field. Sir Sikander Hyat Khan proposed that it should deal in the first instance with defence, customs,<sup>1</sup> currency, and foreign affairs.<sup>2</sup> Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan has submitted the same list. It is certainly a minimal list—it cuts to the bone—and Hindu opinion is evidently unwilling, as yet at any rate, to go so far. It has begun to move from its old unitarian standpoint. The Conciliation Committee, for example, made two notable advances: it recommended first that the old dispute about the 'residuary' powers should be settled in favour of the Provinces, following on this point the lead given by the Congress in 1942, and secondly that the Central field should be as small as possible. But it added to the 'subjects' listed by the Moslems communications, commerce, the settlement of disputes between units of the Union, and 'such other matters of action as may be required for ensuring the safety and tranquillity of India or any part thereof and for the maintenance of the political integrity and economic unity of India or for dealing with any emergencies'. What of those extra subjects? The case for the Central control of communications, especially under modern conditions of transport, is so strong that the Moslems might be disposed to accept it.<sup>3</sup> The case for maintaining the economic unity of India is no less strong. Central control of industrial development, in particular, would greatly facilitate the drafting and execution of those long-term plans mentioned in the preceding chapter. But, as has been pointed out, economics, much more than communications, are a matter of communal controversy; and on this point as on others it must be remembered that Partition is always a possibility—some would say a probability, Mr. Jinnah a certainty—and that it is therefore not a question of imposing an ideal constitution on an India whose unity may be taken for granted, but of devising something by means of which the unity may be preserved. Nor would the assignment, say, of industrial development to Provincial authority necessarily result in economic anarchy. In their own interests the Provincial Governments might be expected to establish permanent Inter-Provincial Commissions to discuss and recommend measures of economic co-operation and co-ordination.

There is a point about a minimal Centre which is apt to be overlooked. It would not only temper Moslem anxiety as to the possi-

<sup>1</sup> 'Customs' is used throughout to mean maritime or sea customs only.

<sup>2</sup> *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. xvi, No. 8, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> Sir Muhammad suggested that the Centre should have power to secure co-ordination in this field for certain purposes.

bility of Central interference in the Moslem-majority Provinces, it would also confine Central business to a field in which domestic communal division would necessarily be neutralised to some extent by external factors. The foreign policy and the defence of India will have to be co-ordinated with a collective international system of some kind.<sup>1</sup> Undertakings will be made by the Centre about which Hindus and Moslems will not be free to quarrel. To a lesser extent the same will be true of tariffs and currency. India will have to adjust her policy to the requirements of international economic co-operation. These are substantial obstacles to the use of a minimal Centre as an arena of Hindu-Moslem conflict.

More difficult is the problem of the Centre's composition. It cannot be on the model of 1935. The Moslems, it seems certain, would prefer no Centre, whatever the material results might be, to one which constitutes in any shape or degree a Hindu Raj. On this issue moderate Moslem opinion may again be represented by Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan. The Moslems claim, he pointed out, to be a separate nation and, as such, entitled, if asked to share in an all-India Centre, to fifty per cent. of all its organs, legislative, executive and judicial. 'If, however,' he wrote, 'the shape of the constitution is such as to reassure them that there would be no room for the domination of one community by another, they might be willing to abate, to some extent, their claim to a fifty per cent. share'.<sup>2</sup>

It was on this question that the Conciliation Committee made its most striking recommendation for the permanent constitution. Having ruled out Partition somewhat peremptorily at the outset—'the division of India into two or more sovereign States is unjustified and dangerous'—it went on to propose that ten per cent. of the seats in the Central Assembly should be allotted to representatives of certain special interests, such as commerce and industry, labour and women; that other seats should be assigned to the Scheduled Castes, the Sikhs, the Indian Christians and the Anglo-Indians; and that the residue (which may be roughly estimated at eighty per cent.) should be shared between the Moslems and the Caste Hindus. 'In the interests of promoting national unity, the Hindu community should agree . . . that the Muslim representation from British India shall be on a par with

<sup>1</sup> International obligations would not affect the thorny question of the communal composition of the Indian Army. This would have to be settled, as in the civil services, by a quota agreement.

<sup>2</sup> *The Times*, 20 March 1945.

the representation given to Hindus (other than Scheduled Castes) in spite of the great disparity in their respective population strength.<sup>1</sup> It was also recommended that the Central Executive should be a composite or coalition Cabinet reflecting the strength of the communities in the Legislature. These proposals constituted on the face of it a remarkable concession. The idea of a communal settlement at the Centre on the basis of 40-40-20 was, it is true, already in the air. But Mr. Bhulabhai Desai's proposals dealt only with an interim arrangement, whereas the Committee was here concerned with the permanent constitution. Nor did its recommendations merely 'lie on the table', an expression of opinion by Liberals who had small responsibility and commanded virtually no votes. They were at once accepted and applauded by the Congress press. 'The Committee,' said the *Hindustan Times*, 'has evolved an alternative to the demand for Pakistan which should be acceptable to all reasonable Muslims.'<sup>2</sup>

This issue was, as has been seen, discussed at Simla; and it would be evidence again that the deadlock was not quite so stiff as it had been if Mr. Jinnah was willing at least to consider the construction of a Council in which the Moslem quota would be less than fifty per cent. But that is uncertain, and in any case it was only with regard to a temporary arrangement. For the future Mr. Jinnah stood firm for Pakistan.

It must be remembered that, at Simla and on other occasions, Hindu-Moslem parity has been discussed with reference to a Centre for British India only. If all India is to form one Union, what about the representation of the Indian States? Since the great majority of their Rulers are Hindus and since the Hindu quota of their aggregate population is nearly sixty per cent. as against a Moslem quota of about thirteen per cent., would not their junction with British India at the Centre upset the communal balance? This difficulty, however, might not prove to be insuperable. If the Princes are bent on preserving the unity of India, would they not be willing to defy the logic of arithmetic and adjust their representation at the Centre to that of British India if this should prove to be essential in order to avoid a Hindu Raj and so prevent Partition?

It would seem, then, that in the Central field also, though the problem is far knottier there than in the Provinces, the deadlock has perceptibly begun to loosen. It may be worth considering

<sup>1</sup> Conciliation Committee: Pamphlet No. 10.

<sup>2</sup> 10 April 1945.

whether it might not be further loosened, whether indeed it might not be resolved in a final settlement, if the measure of agreement, which seems not altogether out of reach with regard to the powers and composition of the Centre, might be extended to the basic question of its purpose or function.

To judge from the Committee's recommendations and their reception by the Congress press, most Hindus continue to regard the Centre as the reflection and instrument of a single Indian nationhood. That attitude is betrayed by the recommendation on the test question of the method of election to the Central Assembly. It should be direct and on an all-India basis, says the Committee,<sup>1</sup> and it proposes that roughly one member should be elected for each million of the population. That is the natural, traditional view. It accords with the practice of all existing Federations: the lower chamber is always directly elected by Federal constituencies to represent the federated nation as a whole. It accords, too, with the orthodox theory of Federalism which treats the Federal Centre and the federated units as deriving their authority from different bodies of public opinion—from the whole combined people of the country in the one case, from the separate peoples of the Provinces in the other. But that, as has been pointed out, runs counter to Moslem sentiment. It affirms the uni-national principle which they deny. It suggests to them a Centre which, however restricted in its powers and balanced in its composition, will somehow some day be used to override Moslem nationalism and impose one nationhood in India.<sup>2</sup> The only Centre, therefore, which moderate Moslems are prepared to contemplate—and it must not be forgotten that the League's official policy is to abolish the Centre altogether—is one which derives its authority not from the people of all India but from the peoples of its component units. In other words, the process of devolving power from the old, strong, unitary British Centre to autonomous Provinces must be reversed. The Provinces must be regarded, like the States, as quasi-sovereign entities which have been liberated from all Central control and proceed of their own free choice to entrust to a Central authority the management, on their behalf, of those of their common affairs for which in their opinion Central management is desirable. It follows, first, that the British Indian members of the Central

<sup>1</sup> Except in the 'special constituencies' for the 'special interests'.

<sup>2</sup> See Mr Jinnah's assertion that the power of a Federal Centre, whatever limit may be set to it at first, is certain in course of time to grow. *Report*, Part III, p. 8.

Assembly would be elected on a Provincial basis, preferably indirectly by the Provincial Legislatures—just as the States' members would be appointed on a State basis—and, secondly, that, when they came to the Centre, they would regard themselves not as representatives of India but as the agents of their Provinces. That was the conception of the Centre held by Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, no academic doctrinaire but a practical statesman. He described it as an 'agency'—and Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan used the same word in submitting the same conception—'a body set up by the units to control and supervise the Central administrative machinery and to see that the work entrusted to it by the Provinces is carried on efficiently, amicably and justly'. Such a Centre, Sir Sikander declared, could not be 'a domineering Centre which may undermine their [the Moslems'] power and authority in the Moslem-majority Provinces'. And, as if to stress Provincial independence and to blunt the edge of separatist sentiment, he suggested that a group of Provinces might be entitled, after ten or fifteen or twenty-five years, to 'reconsider their position' in the light of experience and, if they chose, secede.<sup>1</sup>

This idea of an 'Agency Centre' is a constitutional novelty. It envisages a new kind of Federalism, so new, indeed, as to deserve a different name. It contemplates something between a normal Federation and a mere Confederacy or League. On the one hand, it does not attempt to fit the different entities concerned into the framework of a single nationhood, but only the less ambitious task of securing their combination for essential common purposes. On the other hand, the Centre it postulates is more than a consultative and co-operative Council: it is a Government, executive and legislative, with its own constitutional status, its own powers, its own administrative services. The proposal, in fact, is a true *via media*; and it seems conceivable that the Hindus, having already begun to move towards a settlement, might at least consider the possibility of setting foot on this middle path and that the Moslems for their part might at least be willing to weigh its merits against those of the path to Partition.

One point in the Moslem case remains—the desire to consolidate the Moslem-majority areas, the 'national homelands', into 'Moslem States'. This is not, as has been seen,<sup>2</sup> a new desire. It prompted Sir Muhammad Iqbal's appeal in 1930 for the recognition of the Moslems as 'a distinct political entity' and for the creation to that

<sup>1</sup> *Punjab Legislative Assembly Debates*, vol. xvi, No. 8, pp. 353-6.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 189 above, and *Report*, Part II, pp. 198-9.



end of 'autonomous States based on unity of language, race, history, religion, and identity of economic interests,' linked together by a Centre exercising only the powers vested in it by their free consent. The same objective inspired Sir Sikander Hyat Khan when in 1939 he embodied Iqbal's idea in his scheme for grouping the Provinces in seven Regions one of which would correspond with 'Pakistan' and another with 'North-east India'.<sup>1</sup> And, at the time of the Simla Conference, the Aga Khan, whose standing in the Moslem community has always lent weight to his opinions, cabled to Mr. Gandhi and Maulana Azad, inviting them to consider the creation of a federated Indian Commonwealth of Nations, based on the same Regional principle. He envisaged, as the first step, 'the constitution of the Moslem-majority Provinces in the West into one block and of a united Bengal and Assam in the East'.<sup>2</sup>

The disadvantages of such a plan are obvious. Since the Provinces would never agree to merge their identity in a unitary Region,<sup>3</sup> it implies the establishment of Regional Governments in between the Central and Provincial Governments. Such a triple system, it may be said, would be cumbersome and costly; and, since the Provinces would be loath to surrender to the Region any substantial number of their Provincial 'subjects' of administration, would the Regional Government, it may be asked, have much to do except to gratify Moslem sentiment by its mere existence? It may be argued in reply that a triple system only seems cumbrous for so vast a territory as India because of the false impression of unity and simplicity created by the British Raj. Would such a system seem cumbrous in Europe if the whole continent were to be united under some form of Central government? Against the cost may be set the saving which a 'minimal' Centre would effect

<sup>1</sup> Details and a map will be found in *Report*, Part III, chap. x, where a scheme is also examined for dividing India into four Regions for economic purposes in accordance with the precedent of the Tennessee Valley Authority in making a river-basin the unit of economic control. In two of the Regions demarcated on this principle the majority of the population is Hindu and in the other two Moslem. Hence, if such Regions were used for political as well as economic purposes, their representation at the Centre would be a means of bringing about a communal balance—Mr. K. M. Munshi, Home Minister in the Congress Government of Bombay (1937-9), has suggested the division of British India into two 'zones', Hindu and Moslem, the consolidation of the States as a third, and the equal representation of all three at the Centre. Press telegram, New Delhi, 23 January 1945.

<sup>2</sup> Reuter, Simla, 27 June 1945.

<sup>3</sup> This is admitted by the exponents of Partition. See the 'Pakistan Resolution', *Report*, Part II, p. 206.

through the reduction in the number of its departments and personnel and in the size of its Legislature. Nor would a Regional Government be functionless. It might act as the guarantor of internal security. Its constituent Provinces might conceivably endow it with power to co-ordinate and control their police forces in the event of an outbreak of disorder so serious as to strain, as such outbreaks in the past have often strained, the resources of a single Province. Next in importance to security comes economic progress, and it seems probable that, if a Regional Government did come into being, the Provinces would give it charge of economic planning and industrial development for the Region as a whole—an arrangement which would considerably modify the disintegrating effect of transferring such powers from the Centre to the separate Provinces.

Whatever its prospective merits and drawbacks may be, Regionalism need not, of course, be applied as its authors applied it, to the whole of India. Symmetry is not a necessary feature of the Indian constitution. It would not matter if only the Moslem-majority Provinces wanted Regions and the Hindu-majority Provinces preferred to stay as they are: the operation of the Centre would be unaffected if some Provinces were represented there through Regions and others separately. Nor would it matter if the Indian States chose to be grouped as States for association with British India at the Centre, though, if Regions were in fact established, States which they encircled or adjoined would doubtless find it in their economic interest to be linked up with them. It seems probable, on the whole, that, if the experiment were tried at all, it would be tried, at least to begin with, only by the Moslem-majority Provinces. It was for their sake first and foremost that the notion of it was conceived. And it rests with the Moslems in the first instance to decide whether it shall be tried or not. With the possible exception of the Sikhs, the other communities would have no right or reason to contest the issue. If Regionalism were indeed a factor in a Hindu-Moslem settlement, it would be the only factor which would not require a prior Hindu-Moslem agreement.

It may be that the Moslems would be content if their claims were met as regards those three aspects of the Centre. If the Hindus could bring themselves to concede an Agency Centre with minimal powers and an evenly balanced system of representation, it may be that the Moslems would no longer be overmuch concerned with that other question of territorial consolidation. But if, as seems more likely at the moment, the idea of Moslem statehood

continues to appeal to them, they might go back to Iqbal and reconsider the Regional plan. The value of it lies, of course, in its moderation. It is another *via media*. It aims at satisfying Moslem nationalism without disrupting India. It accepts half the 'Pakistan Resolution'<sup>1</sup> and rejects the other half: it demarcates the Moslem 'homelands' within their own political frontiers, but it does not make them 'independent States'. It provides, in fact, a kind of Pakistan, but not the full-blooded kind which the League is now demanding. Only the Moslems can determine what the difference means to them.

#### 4. THE STATES<sup>2</sup>

A communal settlement would solve the first and major problem of Indian unity. The second problem—the problem of combining British and Indian India in one free State—might not prove so difficult. For the gulf to be bridged is not so wide as the communal schism. In race and faith and language, in their physical character and economic life, the pattern of the Indian States accords, broadly speaking, with that of the country which surrounds or adjoins them. The only substantial difference is historical and political. History has preserved in Indian India the old Indian autocratic form of government while it has developed in British India the forms of Western democracy. The States, it is true, have not been unaffected by that development: the Princes have begun to share their power with their peoples: but nowhere yet in India has monarchy become the constitutional monarchy of Western Europe. Here lies the dominant issue. The territorial integrity of the States is not in question: it would presumably be guaranteed in the constitution. The status of the States *vis-à-vis* the Centre would be similar to that of the Provinces: they would be constituent units of the Centre, delegating to it a minimal field of government, retaining a maximal field of local autonomy. All that is not in doubt. The vital, the controversial issue is the manner in which the States are governed.

This issue has been forced to the front, just as the Hindu-Moslem schism has been deepened, by the prospect of complete and final British abdication. For, just as the British Raj has provided a strong and neutral authority for the protection of minorities

<sup>1</sup> See p. 191 above: full text in *Report*, Part II, p. 206.

<sup>2</sup> For several important points of detail, which are passed over in this chapter, see *Report*, Part III, chap. xii.

in British India, so it has provided in the treaty-system a safeguard of the Princes' rights. And those rights, like Moslem rights, were directly threatened by the declared intention of Mr. Gandhi and his disciples to replace the British with a Congress Raj. The Princes were advised to come to terms with the Congress without delay, or, in other words, to concede the Congress claim that the political difference between British and Indian India should be ironed out forthwith and the government of the States converted at a stroke into full responsible government. And the lesson of 1942, the revelation of the lengths to which the Congress under Mr. Gandhi's leadership was prepared to go, was as plain to the Princes as to the Moslem League. They refuse, therefore, as firmly as the League, to acquiesce in the final withdrawal of British power until their future position has been guaranteed. Here is the second major obstacle to India's emancipation, the second element in the existing deadlock that needs to be resolved.

One possible solution would be the same as the League's—Partition; and the British proposals of 1942 did not rule out that possibility. They accorded to the States the same right of non-adherence to the new constitution as the Provinces, and for the same reason—to prevent the attainment of full freedom by the majority of the Indian people being permanently blocked by minority dissent. But nothing was said at that time as to the status which non-adhering States would occupy, except that a revision of their treaty arrangements would have to be negotiated. In fact two kinds of status seem possible.

(1) It would be difficult but not impracticable for a substantial group of States—not necessarily contiguous in these days of air-transport—to be so linked together as to form an independent Union of their own. Its strategic position and its economic prospects would compare not unfavourably with those of Pakistan. By such a drastic method, it might perhaps be argued, by cutting the States clear away from the democratic contagion of the Provinces, the Princes could make sure of preserving their prerogatives. Their attitude to the Crown makes it probable that they would wish the status of their Union to be that of a Dominion, but in any case the treaty-system would presumably lapse. An independent sovereign State, whether within or without the British Commonwealth, cannot submit to one-sided external intervention of any sort in its domestic affairs.

Most of the drawbacks to this form of Partition, and not least its economic disadvantages, are much the same as those discussed

with regard to the Moslem scheme and need not be repeated here. Nor can the one argument in the States' case which has nothing to correspond with it in the Moslem case be sustained. So far from Partition strengthening the position of the Princes, it would surely weaken it. Frontiers are no barriers to ideas; and the growth of subversive agitation within the States would not be allayed, it would be accelerated and inflamed, if it could be said that for a purely selfish purpose the Princes had thwarted the natural destiny of India and broken the common motherland into pieces.

(2) Another form of States' Partition is conceivable. To judge from their public statements, the value attached by the Princes to the treaty-system as a safeguard of their existing rights is so high that they might conceivably desire, whether grouped or singly, to maintain their present relationship with the Crown. If so, they would presumably take it for granted that British troops would somewhere be available to ensure in the last resort the maintenance of the treaty-guarantees. But for two reasons the adoption of this plan seems as improbable as it is clearly undesirable. In the first place it involves a misconception of the manner in which treaties made more than a century ago must be interpreted to-day. It is freely admitted that the Princes have kept their side of the compacts made by their ancestors. Their vigorous share, for example, in the present war effort is fully recognised. Nor is it questioned that the corresponding British obligations must be honoured. But the lapse of time and the development of political thought in the world at large has made it impossible in these days to put a literal construction on pledges given when the notion of democratic government as it operates now in Britain or in an Indian Province was inconceivable to the men who gave them. During the long interval a system of constitutional government has gradually been developed in British India, and the hope has often been expressed that the Princes would join in this political advance along such lines as might seem to them best suited to conditions in their States. But, while in the past the treaties have been held to forbid coercion to promote such an advance, they cannot be held in the future to require coercion to prevent it. To put it plainly, the British people could not permit the use of British troops to uphold autocracy anywhere in the civilised world. The second argument against this kind of Partition has already been stated in reference to the creation of an independent States' Union, but in this case its force is greatly strengthened. The Princes, it would be said, had not

only wrecked the hopes of Indian nationhood: they had kept two-fifths of India under British rule. The sinister forecast which the Congress leaders made when they denounced the British offer of the right of non-adherence to the States in 1942 would seem to have been justified in the event. The States would be regarded as 'enclaves where foreign authority still prevails . . . a perpetual menace to the freedom of the people of the States as well as the rest of India'.<sup>1</sup>

There are manifest disadvantages, then, in Partition in any form to the States themselves; and the injury it would inflict on India as a whole is no less plain. An India deprived of the States would have lost all coherence. They stand between all four quarters of the country. If no more than the Central Indian States and Hyderabad and Mysore were excluded from the Union, the United Provinces would be almost completely cut off from Bombay, and Bombay completely from Sind.<sup>2</sup> The strategic and economic implications are obvious. India could live if its Moslem limbs in the north-west and north-east were amputated, but could it live without its midriff?

Fortunately the Princes' attitude towards Partition has so far been very different from that of the Moslem League. Some of their ablest Ministers, as has been seen, have condemned it out of hand. Not a voice has been heard in the States in favour of it. It might prove easier, therefore, to adjust the relations between British and Indian India in one Union than to bridge the Hindu-Moslem gulf; and, if the statesmen of British India succeed with the latter task, they ought not to fail with the former. For the issue, it may be repeated, is not steeped in communal emotion: it is dominantly constitutional, a question of the form of government. And, deeply as Indian democrats may deplore that a liberated India should not be a wholly democratic India, surely they will recognise that the association of Provinces and States in one Union cannot be brought about by force and that it can only be brought about by consent if they concede the Princes' claim to settle the political development of their States with their own peoples without external interference. If patriotism demands from British Indian politicians at least that measure of acquiescence in the hard facts of the situation, does it not ask something of the Princes too? Ought they not, on their side, to proclaim their allegiance not only to the cause of Indian unity but also to the principles of liberalism? Rightly or wrongly, they believe that power cannot pass to their peoples yet

<sup>1</sup> *Report*, Part III, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> See maps on p. 37 above and at end.

or at one stroke: but might they not commit themselves to the steady and eventually complete development of constitutional government? Is it not reasonably certain, after all, that, unless the decision of the war is presently reversed and the current of world politics turned back again, monarchy will be able to keep its place in India only as it has elsewhere, not by clinging to prerogative, still less by asking aid of foreigners, but by adapting itself to the progress of democracy throughout the world?

### III

## Britain and India: the Last Chapter

### I. BRITISH OBLIGATIONS

THE preceding chapter was concerned with the kind of settlement required between Indians in order to set India free. But there must also be a settlement between the Indian leaders and the British Government. For the latter has undertaken certain responsibilities in India and is obliged to see to it that they are honourably discharged. That is why the fulfilment of 'British obligations' has always been made a condition of final abdication. They do not, as nationalist critics have sometimes asserted, raise insuperable obstacles which may serve as an excuse for never abdicating. On the contrary, the questions they involve can be settled much more easily than those involved in the internal Indian settlement.<sup>1</sup>

The first question is defence. Hitherto Britain has been primarily responsible for the security of India against external attack; but it is not now, as the war has shown, and it will not be in the future, a matter which concerns Britain and India only. The safety of India is a strategic necessity for all the United Nations. On one side lie the Middle East and the approaches to South Africa and the Suez Canal: on the other side China, Burma, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, and the approaches to Australia and the Pacific. The defence of India, therefore, will be a vital factor in the new system of collective security, but, pending the building-up of her own military and mechanical strength, she will not be able to defend herself unaided. For the time being she will require the help of other naval, air, and land forces, correlated with her own forces in a joint system of defence. Such strategic combinations are necessitated by the conditions of modern warfare; and the leasing to the United States in 1941 of several defence bases on British soil in the West Atlantic are proof, if it be needed, that those combinations cannot be regarded as lowering a nation's status in the world or derogatory to its self-respect.

If free India chooses to remain within the British Commonwealth, she could rely on the assistance of all its sister-nations; but, if she makes the other choice, she could still count on obtaining such British help as she might need. For India dominates the

<sup>1</sup> For more detailed treatment of them, see *Report*, Part III, chap. xiii.



sea and air communications of the Commonwealth, and, if her safety is essential to the safety of the free world as a whole, it is more closely and directly linked with the safety of the Commonwealth than with that of any other Power. In either case the matter would presumably be dealt with by a treaty between the Governments concerned. In the Commonwealth field there is the precedent of the British-South African agreement of 1921 under which, while the Union Government is responsible for the whole coastal defence of South Africa, the British Government is permitted to use the port of Simonstown as a naval base. In the field of foreign relations, besides the American bases mentioned above, there is the precedent of the treaties concluded by Britain with Iraq in 1930 and with Egypt in 1936. The latter terminated the British military occupation of Egypt, but provided that, until Egypt should be able to secure the safety and freedom of the Suez Canal by her own resources, British forces should be stationed in a specified area to co-operate with the Egyptian forces for the Canal's protection. The presence of these British forces, it was declared, would 'in no way prejudice the sovereign rights of Egypt'.<sup>1</sup> As a matter of course they would be used for external defence only. The responsibility for maintaining internal order would rest 'exclusively upon the Egyptian Government'.

Next to defence come the British treaty obligations towards the Indian Princes and the British pledges to the minority communities.

As regards the Princes, the treaties unquestionably require that the British Government should not agree to the transference of the authority now exercised by the Paramount Power to any other Government without the Princes' consent. This undertaking has been repeatedly reaffirmed, and the same principle was implied in the option of non-adherence to the new constitution offered to the States in the British proposals of 1942. Clearly, then, the position of the States in a free India can be determined only with their Rulers' assent, and it was argued in the preceding chapter that it was only in the undesirable event of the Princes retaining their present relations with the Crown that the treaty system would still be valid. If the States should form a separate Dominion, their form of government would be a domestic matter in its own control. If they should adhere to an all-India Union, it would be settled in the constitution, and the safeguard of the treaties would be replaced by the safeguard of the law. In either event the treaty

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 5360; and see *Report*, Part III, pp. 157-9.

system would have become an anachronism and would presumably be abrogated by mutual consent.<sup>1</sup>

Similar arguments apply to the British pledges to the minority communities. They are concentrated, so to speak, in the British Government's undertaking not to accept, still less to impose, a constitutional settlement in which the communities do not acquiesce. As regards the largest of them, the Moslems, that undertaking was reflected, as in the case of the States, in the option of non-adherence offered to the Provinces in 1942. But, of course, the territorial distribution of the communities, including the Moslems, is not on a Provincial basis; and the other minorities, particularly the 48 millions of the Scheduled Castes, cannot fall back on Partition in the last resort. They must secure their rights in the new constitution, and, having secured them, they must depend for their maintenance on the sovereignty of law. An additional guarantee was suggested in the British proposals of 1942, which contemplated the conclusion of a treaty between the British Government and the Indian constitutional convention providing *inter alia* 'for the protection of racial and religious minorities'. But this proposal is open to serious objections. It does not accord with Dominion status: it is inconceivable that any Dominion would concede such a treaty right to Britain. If India opts for secession from the Commonwealth, the fate of the one-sided and ineffectual Minority Treaties in Europe would be scarcely an encouraging precedent. And how would such a treaty be expected to operate? How could the British Government satisfy itself that an alleged breach of it had in fact occurred? And, if satisfied, how could it afford the promised 'protection' except by direct intervention in the administration of India, backed in the last necessity by force? And how would this square with the military situation if there were also a defence treaty under which British and Indian forces were inter-linked on the frontier? Quite apart, moreover, from the practical difficulties it would involve, the effects of such intervention would surely be deplorable. It would bring British 'imperialism' back onto the stage of Indian politics. It would seem to justify the nationalist charge that Britain had never meant India to be really free. It would dissipate all hope of a friendlier relationship between free India and Britain. If she had chosen to stay in the Commonwealth, it would instantly drive her out. Nor would it serve the cause of the minorities. They would be regarded by the majorities

<sup>1</sup> For the possibility of retaining a personal relationship with the Crown for certain purposes, see *Report*, Part III, p. 154.

as traitors to the national cause who had enabled Britain to retain a remnant of her old authority in India and so degraded the status of her nationhood. Surely, then, the idea of a treaty to prolong British obligations towards the minorities under the new régime ought to be reconsidered by all parties concerned. Surely the minorities' acceptance of the new constitution should be regarded as the full and final discharge of British pledges on their behalf, just as the Princes' acceptance of it should be regarded as terminating the treaty system.

There is one body of Indians who might be described as a minority, but are seldom mentioned in discussions of the minority problem—the inhabitants of the so-called 'backward' or 'excluded' areas. They number about 12 millions, scattered over five Provinces, mainly in hill or forest country, and they are mostly at a primitive stage of civilisation and incapable as yet of an effective share in democratic government. The British Government, which has hitherto excluded most of these defenceless folk from the scope of Indian self-government, would clearly be entitled to require that their rights are safeguarded in the new constitution as fully as the rights of minorities better able to speak for themselves.<sup>1</sup>

The next British obligation concerns the future of the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force and the so-called 'Secretary of State's Services'.<sup>2</sup> All these bodies have been recruited on the British Government's authority and have operated under its ultimate control. Plainly they cannot continue on this footing when the final British abdication is effected. A free India will recruit and control all its own armed forces and all its own civil servants. Plainly, also, the existing services cannot be bodily or mechanically transferred from one authority to another. Soldiers and civilians, Indian and British, they must all be free to make their choice. If the Indian Governments wish to retain any of them, they must offer them new terms of service. For those whom they wish to dispense with and for those who on their part wish to terminate their services, a fair financial settlement must be made and guaranteed. This is a matter in which British public opinion will be closely interested, particularly with regard to the Indian Army

<sup>1</sup> One group of them, the people of the hill tracts on the eastern border of Assam, seems to call for special treatment: they are alike in race and culture to their neighbours on the Burman side of the border, and the problem of their administration will be tied up with the problem of the frontier.

<sup>2</sup> The most important of these Services are the Indian Civil Service and the Indian Police. In 1943 the former had 560 British members and 629 Indian, the latter 373 British and 203 Indian.

whose exploits in the common fight for freedom are known to all the world.<sup>1</sup>

The question of the financial obligation, which the British Government assumed when India incurred her public debt under its control and with its backing, has been settled by the course of war finance. Nearly all the part of that debt known as the 'sterling debt' and mainly raised in Britain has already been 'repatriated', and, as was pointed out in an earlier chapter, the old financial relationship has been reversed by the British Government's huge expenditure for war purposes in India.<sup>2</sup> The part of the public debt known as the 'rupee debt' and mainly raised in India will remain an obligation of the new Government of India. If India is partitioned, there must be another such equitable division as was made when Burma was separated from India in 1937.

There remains an obligation which has been much discussed by British business men in India and in Britain. Ought not the British commercial community to continue to be regarded as a minority community entitled to the same safeguards as the Indian minorities? And ought not they to be protected against the possibility of unfair discrimination on the part of the new Indian Government? The answers to those questions have already been given by the British Government. In the course of a debate in the House of Lords in 1942, the Duke of Devonshire, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India, pointed out that the question was governed by the offer to India of Dominion Status. Unlike the Indian minorities, the British business community in India could not obtain guarantees for their protection as a condition of an agreed constitution. No such guarantees were exacted when the former British Colonies became self-governing Dominions: they can only be obtained as between equal partners, by free negotiation. British commercial interests in the Dominions, declared the Duke, are by no means neglected by the British Government, but

<sup>1</sup> As to the I.C.S. and I.P. it was announced in June 1945 by the then Secretary of State (Mr. Amery) that 'it is an essential corollary of His Majesty's Government's declared policy of promoting full self-government in India and Burma that, from dates as yet uncertain in either case, appointments held by tenure from the Secretary of State will cease'. Candidates for entry into these Services have been warned that their appointments may thus be terminated at any time, subject to due notice and the payment of specified compensatory grants. (*Civil Appointments in India and Burma*, 1945.) As regards the Army it seems probable that all permanent entries into the Indian Army will in future be Indian and that British officers will be provided, as required, by seconding for fixed periods.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 58 above.

they are not dealt with by the methods which led to the 'Boston tea-party' but by bilateral negotiation and agreement.<sup>1</sup> Such a procedure, it may be added, is not only dictated by the implications of Dominion Status: it clearly accords with the interests of British business, since the best safeguard of any trading concern—the only valid safeguard in the end—is the goodwill of the people among whom it trades.

## 2. INDIA AND THE COMMONWEALTH

Since 1926 the 'free association' of the nations of the British Commonwealth has been generally interpreted as implying freedom to dissociate, and this implication was confirmed at the outbreak of war in 1939. If the majority of the South African Parliament had voted for neutrality, the other members of the Commonwealth would all certainly, if for the most part sorrowfully, acquiesce. The decision of the one member, Eire, who did choose to be neutral, was respected, despite the serious menace it involved to the safety of Britain and in due course to the cause of all the United Nations. But it was not till the British Government's offer to India in 1942 that the implication was made explicit. It was then proposed that, when the Indian Union or Unions were established and *ipso facto* acquired Dominion Status, an Indo-British treaty would be concluded which would not, it was declared, 'impose any restriction on the power of the Indian Union to decide in the future its relation to the other Member States of the British Commonwealth'. This sentence was underlined by Sir Stafford Cripps at Delhi. 'The Union', he said, 'will be completely free either to remain within or to go without the British Commonwealth.'<sup>2</sup>

India, then, will be free to choose her partners, but partners of one sort or another she must have. She will be no more able than any other country to stand alone in the world. Her strategic and economic needs alike forbid such isolationism. She will have her place in the global system of security under the Charter of the United Nations; but she will also need to be associated with neighbouring countries in one of those regional groups which are recognised by the Charter as supplementary instruments for the maintenance of peace. The natural grouping would, it has been suggested, include Burma, Ceylon and Malaysia—a regional system, in fact, for South-East Asia<sup>3</sup>—and it would link on with the outer

<sup>1</sup> *Hansard*, H. of L., cxxiv, col. 149.

<sup>2</sup> *Report*, Part III, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> K. M. Pannikar, *The Future of South-East Asia* (London, 1943).

bastions of India's security to east and west, with Australia and New Zealand on the one side, with South Africa, Mauritius and Aden on the other. All those territories, with the sole exception of the Dutch East Indies, are associated in the Commonwealth; and all of them need India's co-operation for their safety as much as India needs theirs. For her economic welfare, likewise, India will want partners. The rapid execution of her plans for industrial development, in particular, will demand assistance from outside in the provision of capital plant, in the training of technicians and so forth. There is no question, it need hardly be said, of attempting to establish an exclusive regional monopoly—no more now than at any time in the past—but, if India should seek for some measure of co-operation within the Commonwealth, it would, of course, be readily forthcoming. It is common knowledge that Britain, for her part, will depend for maintaining her standard of living in the years ahead on the expansion of her export trade.

History might seem to prompt the choice to stay within the Commonwealth. India's long and close connexion with Britain has woven ties that cannot be broken in a day. For generations past Indians have worked with Englishmen, comrades and friends, in the army, in the civil services, in the courts, in the professional and scientific and commercial world; and for many years now every educated Indian has spoken English and acquired from English literature, more than from any other foreign literature, his ideas of human personality and freedom. But history cuts both ways. For, while there are still many Indians who are well-disposed towards Britain, the inevitable bitterness created by the nationalist movement and its periodical repression has coloured Indian patriotism with a steadily increasing antipathy to their overlords; and it has been intensified by a distrust, which has only recently begun to weaken, in the sincerity of British promises that India should be free. Maybe, when freedom comes at last, the mood will change; but many educated Indians may still feel impelled by pride in their own country and resentment at its long subjection to sever all connexion between the sometime-rulers and the sometime-ruled. Such a decision, however, would not be by any means unanimous. Those well-disposed Indians, remembering old personal associations, would regret it. Some of the minority communities, too, might opt for staying in the Commonwealth, not because it would afford them any prospect of external intervention in the domestic life of India—the impracticability of that has been stressed on an earlier page—but

because they might feel more comfortable in an international society which, whatever its critics may say, has a high repute in the world for its traditions of justice and individual liberty.<sup>1</sup> Indian India, lastly, might well be loath to follow the path to secession. History has not given the Princes' patriotism that anti-British hue, and many of them feel a sense of personal devotion to the Crown. A decision to break away, then, could not be the decision of all India; and, that being so, is it reasonable to suppose that, if the majority took that line, it would try to impose their will on the minority? Their very freedom to make the choice would be due to their having succeeded in achieving a constitutional settlement, and they could only have done that by compromise and give-and-take, by generosity to minorities, by refusing to press the logic of numbers. Is it likely, then, that they would imperil the new-won unity of India by forcing the question of secession to an issue at any rate until the new régime had had time to settle down and India had learned what it meant in actual practice to be a free and equal partner in the Commonwealth?

The British people for their part earnestly hope that India will find, as Mr. Churchill put it, 'full satisfaction within the British Commonwealth of Nations'.<sup>2</sup> And it is not only or even mainly material interests, strategic or economic, that they have in mind. They hold that the Commonwealth has been uniquely successful in combining freedom with unity in international relations, and they are proud of their share in its creation. But its existing member-nations are mainly of European and largely of British stock; most of them have, so to speak, grown up from birth within the Commonwealth; and, the lesson of the American Revolution having been taken to heart, the task of extending freedom without breaking unity has not, with the sorry exception of Eire, proved too difficult. India's case is very different. In width of territory and in mass of population she dwarfs those others. She is not a 'young country' but a very old one. Her folk and culture, unlike those of the Dominions, are rooted in her own historic soil: she possessed a civilised society when Britain was still barbarian.

<sup>1</sup> The case of South Africa is exceptional. While there is a growing body of liberal opinion in the Union, the European minority as a whole holds it necessary to impose restrictions on the non-European majority in order to protect its own standards of civilisation. The application of this policy to Indians domiciled in the Union has caused serious friction in past years (see p. 117 above), and recent restrictive legislation has been deeply resented in India.

<sup>2</sup> At Guildhall: *The Times*, 1 July 1943.

And, so far from being born and brought up within the Commonwealth, she has been linked with it, directly or indirectly, by compulsion. So were the French Canadians and the Dutch South Africans, but it is harder for Indians, after all that has passed, to make the choice that they have made. Yet, if they choose otherwise, the full potential value of the Commonwealth to its own members and to the world at large will not be realised. If India is one of its associates, the Commonwealth will be a far more impressive example of the possibilities of international and inter-racial relationship than if all of them are wholly or predominantly European. Bridging the gulfs between all the continents, affording its members a more constant and intimate contact than they can hope as yet to enjoy in the great company of the United Nations, it might do more, perhaps, than anything else to bring about that 'reconciliation of East and West' on which the survival of human civilisation may come in the end to depend.

And there is more than that in the British people's hope that India will not choose to break away. It is a matter of deep and genuine sentiment. The British connexion with India began more than 300 years ago. For 150 years it has been so close that British history and Indian history have been woven together. And much of the thread has been spun in British households in which service in India became a family tradition, and the Indian scene seemed never far away, and the names of Indian towns and districts were almost as familiar as those of Britain itself. For their sons were spending the best part of their lives in India, trying, most of them, to help the Indian people according to their lights, and learning, many of them, to love India before they came back home. Some of them never came back. In the close-packed graveyards of India lies much British dust.

With such a record and such memories, it is hard for Britons to think that the soil of India can ever be foreign soil in quite the same sense as that of China, and may not Indians on their side feel that Britons are not strangers in quite the same sense as other folk? When at last free India faces Britain on an equal footing, is it too much to hope that, remembering the good and forgetting the ill that has come of the fate which brought them together, she will not want to turn her back and keep her distance? If that proves to be her choice, it will be a happy ending to the story which began when English seamen first set sail across the oceans and those quiet traders landed on the Indian coast.



# DOCUMENTS

## No. 1

### THE MISGOVERNMENT OF OUDH

Extracts from *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude* by W. H. Sleeman (London, 1858).

#### i

I have every day scores of petitions delivered to me 'with quivering lip and tearful eye', by persons who have been plundered of all they possessed, had their dearest relatives murdered or tortured to death, and their habitations burnt to the ground, by gangs of ruffians, under landlords of high birth and pretensions, whom they had never wronged or offended; some, merely because they happened to have property, which the ruffians wished to take—others, because they presumed to live and labour upon lands which they coveted, or deserted, and wished to have left waste. In these attacks, neither age, nor sex, nor condition are spared.<sup>1</sup>

#### ii

At Palee resides Bulbhuder Sing, a notorious robber, who was lately seized and sent as a felon to Lucknow. After six months' confinement he bribed himself out, got possession of the estate which he now holds, and to which he had no right whatever, and had it excluded from the jurisdiction of the local authorities. . . . He has been ever since diligently employed in converting it into a den of robbers, and in the usual way seizing upon other people's lands, stock, and property of all kinds. Hundreds in Oude are doing the same thing in the same way. Scores of those who suffer from the depredations of this class of offenders, complain to me every day; but I can neither afford them redress, nor hold out any hope of it from any of the Oude authorities. It is a proverb, 'that those who are sentenced to six years' imprisonment in Oude are released in six months, and those who are sentenced to six months are released in six years'. . . . Those who are in for long periods are, for the most part, great offenders, who are the most able and most willing to pay high for their release; those who are in for short ones are commonly the small ones, who are the least able and least disposed to give anything. The great offenders again are those who are most disposed, and most able, to revenge themselves on such persons as have aided the Government in their arrest or conviction; and they do all they can to murder and rob them and their families and relatives, as

<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., i. 176.

soon as they are set at large, in order to deter others from doing the same. This would be a great evil in any country, but is terrible in Oude, where no police is maintained for the protection of life and property. The cases of atrocious murders and robberies which come before me every day, and are acknowledged by the local authorities and neighbours of the sufferers to have taken place, are frightful. Such sufferings, for which no redress is to be found, would soon desolate any part of India less favoured by nature.<sup>1</sup>

## iii

To refer such sufferers to the authorities at Lucknow would be a still more cruel mockery. The present sovereign never hears a complaint or reads a petition or report of any kind. He is entirely taken up with the pursuit of his personal gratifications. . . . He lives exclusively in the society of fiddlers, eunuchs and women: he has done so since childhood and is likely to do so to the last. . . . He sees occasionally his prime minister, who takes care to persuade him that he does all that a King ought to do. . . . Anyone who presumes to approach him, even in his rides or drives, with a petition for justice is instantly clapped into prison or otherwise punished.<sup>2</sup>

## iv

I omitted to mention that, at Busora on the 27th, a Rajpoot landholder of the Sombunsie tribe came to my camp with a petition regarding a mortgage, and mentioned that he had a daughter, now two years of age; that when she was born he was out in his fields, and the females of the family put her into an earthen pot, buried her in the floor of the apartment, where the mother lay, and lit a fire over the grave; that he made all haste home as soon as he heard of the birth of a daughter, removed the fire and earth from the pot, and took out his child. She was still living, but two of her fingers which had not been sufficiently covered were a good deal burnt. He had all possible care taken of her, and she still lives; and both he and his wife are very fond of her.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., ii. 41-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., i. 178.

Ibid., ii. 59.

## BRITISH FORECASTS OF INDIAN SELF-GOVERNMENT

i. Lord Hastings. Governor-General, 1813-1822. Writing in 1818. (*Private Journal*, London, 1858, ii. 326.)

A time, not very remote, will arrive when England will, on sound principles of policy, wish to relinquish the domination which she has gradually and unintentionally assumed over this country and from which she cannot at present recede.

ii. Sir Thomas Munro. Served in India, 1780-1827. Governor of Madras, 1819-1827. Minute of 31 December 1824. (R. Muir, *The Making of British India*, Manchester, 1917, pp. 283-5.)

There is one great question to which we should look in all our arrangements: What is to be their final result on the character of the people? Is it to be raised, or is it to be lowered? Are we to be satisfied with merely securing our power and protecting the inhabitants, leaving them to sink gradually in character lower than at present; or are we to endeavour to raise their character, and to render them worthy of filling higher situations in the management of their country, and of devising plans for its improvement? It ought undoubtedly to be our aim to raise the minds of the natives, and to take care that whenever our connection with India might cease, it did not appear that the only fruit of our dominion there had been to leave the people more abject and less able to govern themselves than when we found them. . . . This principle once established, we must trust to time and perseverance for realising the object of it. We have had too little experience, and are too little acquainted with the natives, to be able to determine without trial what means would be most likely to facilitate their improvement. Various measures might be suggested, which might all probably be more or less useful; but no one appears to me so well calculated to insure success as that of endeavouring to give them a higher opinion of themselves, by placing more confidence in them, by employing them in important situations, and perhaps by rendering them eligible to almost every office under Government. . . .

Liberal treatment has always been found the most effectual way of elevating the character of any people, and we may be sure that it will produce a similar effect on that of the people of India. The change will no doubt be slow; but that is the very reason why no time should

be lost in commencing the work. We should not be discouraged by difficulties; nor, because little progress may be made in our own time, abandon the enterprise as hopeless, and charge upon the obstinacy and bigotry of the natives the failure which has been occasioned solely by our own fickleness, in not pursuing steadily the only line of conduct on which any hope of success could be reasonably founded. . . .

We should look upon India, not as a temporary possession, but as one which is to be maintained permanently, until the natives shall in some future age have abandoned most of their superstitions and prejudices, and become sufficiently enlightened to frame a regular government for themselves, and to conduct and preserve it. Whenever such a time shall arrive, it will probably be best for both countries that the British control over India should be gradually withdrawn. That the desirable change contemplated may in some after age be effected in India, there is no cause to despair. Such a change was at one time in Britain itself at least as hopeless as it is here. When we reflect how much the character of nations has always been influenced by that of governments, and that some, once the most cultivated, have sunk into barbarism, while others, formerly the rudest, have attained the highest point of civilisation, we shall see no reason to doubt that if we pursue steadily the proper measures, we shall in time so far improve the character of our Indian subjects as to enable them to govern and protect themselves.

iii. T. B. (later Lord) Macaulay. Commissioner of the Board of Control, 1832; Secretary, 1833. Law Member of Governor-General's Council, 1834-1838. Speaking in the House of Commons, 10 July 1833. (*Hansard*, xix (1833), 536.)

The destinies of our Indian empire are covered with thick darkness. It is difficult to form any conjecture as to the fate reserved for a state which resembles no other in history, and which forms by itself a separate class of political phenomena. The laws which regulate its growth and its decay are still unknown to us. It may be that the public mind of India may expand under our system till it has outgrown that system; that by good government we may educate our subjects into a capacity for better government; that, having become instructed in European knowledge, they may, in some future age, demand European institutions. Whether such a day will ever come I know not. But never will I attempt to avert or to retard it. Whenever it comes, it will be the proudest day in English history. To have found a great people sunk in the lowest depths of slavery and superstition, to have so ruled them as to have made them desirous and capable of all the privileges of citizens, would indeed be a title to glory all our own.

iv. Sir Henry Lawrence. Served in India, 1823-1857. President of Punjab Board, 1849-1853. Chief Commissioner, Oudh, 1856-1857. Writing in 1844. (*Essays*, London, 1859, pp. 59-60; quoted by J. L. Morison, *Lawrence of Lucknow*, London, 1934, p. 57.)

We cannot expect to hold India for ever. Let us so conduct ourselves . . . as, when the connexion ceases, it may do so not with convulsions but with mutual esteem and affection, and that England may then have in India a noble ally, enlightened and brought into the scale of nations under her guidance and fostering care.

v. Sir Herbert Edwardes. Served in India, 1841-1865. Commissioner, Peshawar, 1853-1859; Umballa, 1862. Lecturing at Manchester in 1860. (*Memorials of the Life and Letters of Sir H. B. Edwardes*, London, 1886, ii. 243.)

It may take years, it may take a century, to fit India for self-government, but it is a thing worth doing and a thing that may be done. It is a distinct and intelligible Indian policy for England to pursue—a way for both countries out of the embarrassments of their twisted destinies.

## No. 3

### THE CONGRESS AND THE MOSLEM LEAGUE IN 1937

The terms on which the leaders of the Moslem League in the United Provinces might be invited to join the Provincial Government were laid down as follows by Maulana A. K. Azad on behalf of the Congress.

The Moslem League group in the United Provinces Legislature shall cease to function as a separate group.

The existing members of the Moslem League Party in the United Provinces Assembly shall become part of the Congress Party, and will fully share with other members of the Party their privileges and obligations as members of the Congress Party. They will similarly be empowered to participate in the deliberations of the Party. They will likewise be subject to the control and discipline of the Congress Party in an equal measure with other members, and the decisions of the Congress Party as regards work in the legislature and general behaviour of its members shall be binding on them. All matters shall be decided by a majority vote of the Party; each individual member having one vote.

The policy laid down by the Congress Working Committee for their members in the legislatures along with the instructions issued by the competent Congress bodies pertaining to their work in such legislatures shall be faithfully carried out by all members of the Congress Party including these members.

The Moslem League Parliamentary Board in the United Provinces will be dissolved, and no candidates will thereafter be set up by the said Board at any by-election. All members of the Party shall actively support any candidate that may be nominated by the Congress to fill up a vacancy occurring hereafter.

All members of the Congress Party shall abide by the rules of the Congress Party and offer their full and genuine co-operation with a view to promoting the interests and prestige of the Congress.

In the event of the Congress Party deciding on resignation from the Ministry or from the legislature the members of the above-mentioned group will also be bound by that decision.

To the published statement of these terms Maulana Azad appended a short note.

It was hoped that, if these terms were agreed to and the Moslem League group of members joined the Congress Party as full members, that group would cease to exist as a separate group. In the formation of the Provincial Cabinet it was considered proper that they should have representatives.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Pioneer*, 30 July 1937.

## No. 4

### STATEMENT OF BRITISH POLICY, 14 JUNE 1945

1. During the recent visit of Field-Marshal Viscount Wavell to this country His Majesty's Government reviewed with him a number of problems and discussed particularly the present political situation in India.

2. Members will be aware that since the offer by His Majesty's Government to India in March 1942 there has been no further progress towards the solution of the Indian constitutional problem.

3. As was then stated, the working out of India's new constitutional system is a task which can only be carried through by the Indian peoples themselves.

4. While His Majesty's Government are at all times most anxious to do their utmost to assist the Indians in the working out of a new constitutional settlement, it would be a contradiction in terms to speak of the imposition by this country of self-governing institutions upon an unwilling India. Such a thing is not possible, nor could we accept the responsibility for enforcing such institutions at the very time when we were, by its purpose, withdrawing from all control of British Indian affairs.

5. The main constitutional position remains therefore as it was. The offer of March 1942 stands in its entirety without change or qualification. His Majesty's Government still hope that the political leaders in India may be able to come to an agreement as to the procedure whereby India's permanent future form of government can be determined.

6. His Majesty's Government are, however, most anxious to make any contribution that is practicable to the breaking of the political deadlock in India. While that deadlock lasts not only political but social and economic progress is being hampered.

7. The Indian administration, over-burdened with the great tasks laid upon it by the war against Japan and by the planning for the post-war period, is further strained by the political tension that exists.

8. All that is so urgently required to be done for agricultural and industrial development and for the peasants and workers of India cannot be carried through unless the whole-hearted co-operation of every community and section of the Indian people is forthcoming.

9. His Majesty's Government have therefore considered whether there is something which they could suggest in this interim period, under the existing constitution, pending the formulation by Indians of their future constitutional arrangements, which would enable the main communities and parties to co-operate more closely together and with the British to the benefit of the people of India as a whole.

10. It is not the intention of His Majesty's Government to introduce any change contrary to the wishes of the major Indian communities. But they are willing to make possible some step forward during the interim period if the leaders of the principal Indian parties are prepared to agree to their suggestions and to co-operate in the successful conclusion of the war against Japan as well as in the reconstruction in India which must follow the final victory.

11. To this end they would be prepared to see an important change in the composition of the Viceroy's Executive. This is possible without making any change in the existing statute law except for one amendment to the Ninth Schedule to the Act of 1935. That Schedule contains a provision that not less than three members of the Executive must have had at least ten years' service under the Crown in India. If the proposals of His Majesty's Government meet with acceptance in India, that clause would have to be amended to dispense with that requirement.

12. It is proposed that the Executive Council should be re-constituted and that the Viceroy should in future make his selection for nomination to the Crown for appointment to his Executive from amongst leaders of Indian political life at the Centre and in the Provinces, in proportions which would give a balanced representation of the main communities, including equal proportions of Moslems and Caste Hindus.

13. In order to pursue this object, the Viceroy will call into conference a number of leading Indian politicians who are the heads of the most important parties or who have had recent experience as Prime Ministers of Provinces, together with a few others of special experience and authority. The Viceroy intends to put before this conference the proposal that the Executive Council should be reconstituted as above stated and to invite from the members of the conference a list of names. Out of these he would hope to be able to choose the future members whom he would recommend for appointment by His Majesty to the Viceroy's Council, although the responsibility for the recommendations



must of course continue to rest with him, and his freedom of choice therefore remains unrestricted.

14. The members of his Council who are chosen as a result of this arrangement would of course accept the position on the basis that they would whole-heartedly co-operate in supporting and carrying through the war against Japan to its victorious conclusion.

15. The members of the Executive would be Indians with the exception of the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, who would retain his position as War Member. This is essential so long as the defence of India remains a British responsibility.

16. Nothing contained in any of these proposals will affect the relations of the Crown with the Indian States through the Viceroy as Crown Representative.

17. The Viceroy has been authorised by His Majesty's Government to place this proposal before the Indian Leaders. His Majesty's Government trust that the leaders of the Indian communities will respond. For the success of such a plan must depend upon its acceptance in India and the degree to which responsible Indian politicians are prepared to co-operate with the object of making it a workable interim arrangement. In the absence of such general acceptance existing arrangements must necessarily continue.

18. If such co-operation can be achieved at the Centre it will no doubt be reflected in the Provinces and so enable responsible Governments to be set up once again in those Provinces where, owing to the withdrawal of the majority party from participation, it became necessary to put into force the powers of the Governors under Section 93 of the Act of 1935. It is to be hoped that in all the Provinces these Governments would be based on the participation of the main parties, thus smoothing out communal differences and allowing Ministers to concentrate upon their very heavy administrative tasks.

19. There is one further change which, if these proposals are accepted, His Majesty's Government suggest should follow.

20. That is, that External Affairs (other than those tribal and frontier matters which fall to be dealt with as part of the defence of India) should be placed in the charge of an Indian Member of the Viceroy's Executive so far as British India is concerned, and that fully accredited representatives shall be appointed for the representation of India abroad.

21. By their acceptance of and co-operation in this scheme the Indian leaders will not only be able to make their immediate

contribution to the direction of Indian affairs, but it is also to be hoped that their experience of co-operation in government will expedite agreement between them as to the method of working out the new constitutional arrangements.

22. His Majesty's Government consider, after the most careful study of the question, that the plan now suggested gives the utmost progress practicable within the present constitution. None of the changes suggested will in any way prejudice or prejudge the essential form of the future permanent constitution or constitutions for India.

23. His Majesty's Government feel certain that given goodwill and a genuine desire to co-operate on all sides, both British and Indian, these proposals can mark a genuine step forward in the collaboration of the British and Indian peoples towards Indian self-government and can assert the rightful position, and strengthen the influence, of India in the counsels of the nations.

## No. 5

BROADCAST BY LORD WAVELL, 19 SEPTEMBER 1945

As stated in the gracious Speech from the Throne at the opening of Parliament, His Majesty's Government are determined to do their utmost to promote, in conjunction with the leaders of Indian opinion, the early realisation of full self-government in India. During my visit to London they have discussed with me the steps to be taken.

An announcement has already been made that elections to the Central and Provincial Legislatures, so long postponed owing to the war, are to be held during the coming cold weather. Thereafter His Majesty's Government earnestly hope that ministerial responsibility will be accepted by political leaders in all Provinces.

It is the intention of His Majesty's Government to convene as soon as possible a constitution-making body, and as a preliminary step they have authorised me to undertake, immediately after the elections, discussions with representatives of the Legislative Assemblies in the Provinces, to ascertain whether the proposals contained in the 1942 Declaration are acceptable or whether some alternative or modified scheme is preferable. Discussions will also be undertaken with the representatives of Indian States with a view to ascertaining in what way they can best take their part in the constitution-making body. His Majesty's Government are proceeding to the consideration of the content of the treaty which will require to be concluded between Great Britain and India.

During these preparatory stages, the government of India must be carried on, and urgent economic and social problems must be dealt with. Furthermore, India has to play her full part in working out the new world order. His Majesty's Government have therefore further authorised me, as soon as the results of the Provincial elections are published, to take steps to bring into being an Executive Council which will have the support of the main Indian parties.

That is the end of the announcement which His Majesty's Government have authorised me to make. It means a great deal. It means that His Majesty's Government are determined to go ahead with the task of bringing India to self-government at the earliest possible date. They have, as you can well imagine, a great

number of most important and urgent problems on their hands; but in spite of all their preoccupations they have taken time, almost in their first days of office, to give attention to the Indian problem, as one of the first and most important. That fact is a measure of the earnest resolve of His Majesty's Government to help India to achieve early self-government.

The task of making and implementing a new constitution for India is a complex and difficult one, which will require goodwill, co-operation, and patience on the part of all concerned. We must first hold elections so that the will of the Indian electorate may be known. It is not possible to undertake any major alteration of the franchise system. This would delay matters for at least two years. But we are doing our best to revise the existing electoral rolls efficiently.

After the elections I propose to hold discussions with representatives of those elected and of the Indian States to determine the form which the constitution-making body should take, its powers and procedure. The draft declaration of 1942 proposed a method of setting up a constitution-making body, but His Majesty's Government recognise that, in view of the great issues involved and the delicacy of the minority problems, consultation with the people's representatives is necessary before the form of the constitution-making body is finally determined.

The above procedure seems to His Majesty's Government and myself the best way open to us to give India the opportunity of deciding her destiny. We are well aware of the difficulties to be overcome, but are determined to overcome them. We can certainly assure you that the Government and all sections of the British people are anxious to help India, which has given us so much help in winning this war. I for my part will do my best, in the service of the people of India, to help them to arrive at their goal, and I firmly believe that it can be done. It is now for Indians to show that they have the wisdom, faith, and courage to determine in what way they can best reconcile their differences, and how their country can be governed by Indians for Indians.

# STATISTICS OF POPULATION AND COMMUNITIES

TABLE I

INDIA: POPULATION, 1941

	Males	Females	Total
British India . . .	153,045,000	142,782,000	295,809,000
States and Agencies . . .	47,883,000	45,090,000	93,189,000
Total . . .	200,928,000	187,872,000	388,998,000

TABLE II

INDIA: PRINCIPAL COMMUNITIES, 1941

(All figures are given in thousands)

Province or State	Hindus other than Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Castes	Moslems	Christians	Sikhs	Total Population
Madras . . .	34,731	8,068	3,896	2,047	0.4	49,342
Bombay . . .	14,700	1,855	1,920	375	8	20,850
Bengal . . .	17,680	7,379	33,005	166	16	60,307
U P . . .	34,095	11,717	8,416	160	232	55,021
Punjab . . .	6,302	1,249	16,217	505	3,757	28,419
Bihar . . .	22,174	4,340	4,716	35	13	36,340
C P . . .	9,881	3,051	784	59	15	16,814
Assam . . .	3,537	676	3,442	41	3	10,205
N W F P . . .	180	—	2,789	11	58	3,038
Orissa . . .	5,595	1,238	146	28	0.2	8,729
Sind . . .	1,038	192	3,208	20	31	4,535
Total, British India . . .	150,890	39,921	79,399	3,482	4,165	295,809
Hyderabad* . . .	10,382	2,928	2,097	220	5	16,339
Mysore* . . .	5,282	1,405	485	113	0.3	7,329
Travancore* . . .	3,146	396	434	1,960	—	6,070
Kashmir*† . . .	694	113	3,074	4	66	4,022
Gwalior* . . .	3,463	—	241	2	2	4,006
Baroda* . . .	1,963	231	224	9	0.6	2,855
Total, States and Agencies . . .	55,227	8,892	12,660	2,834	1,526	93,189
Total, India . . .	206,117	48,813	92,058‡	6,317§	5,691	388,998

\* The six States that appear here are those with the largest population.

† Including feudatories.

‡ The total population of India recorded by communities at the Census of 1941 was 386,667,000. The remainder, 2,331,000, consists of persons in the North-West Agency and tribal areas beyond the administered border, whose community could not be ascertained. The conditions of the region, however, indicate that they may be regarded as Moslems. If they are counted as Moslems, the total number of Moslems in India becomes 94,389,000.

§ The figures for Christians given in the Census overlap with those for Tribes. Allowing for this, the total number of Christians is estimated at 7,250,000.



# Index

- Acts of Parliament relating to India: (1813-1909) 21, 28, 43-4, 47, 72-5, 78-81, 99-107; (1861) 73-5, 78-9, 81, 99, 100, 113; (1919) 107-8, 112-13, 117-18, 121-4, 127-9, 132, 192; (1927) 127; (1935) 127, 142-9, 152-7, 164, 188-93, 197, 201, 207, 227, 239, 248, 252, 257, 267, 269, 296-7. *See also* Congress; Federal Schemes of Government.
- Afghanistan, 6, 7, 18, 32, 40, 48, 50, 59, 82, 116, 191.
- Aga Khan, the, 105, 273.
- Agrarian reform: Congress and, 152, 155, 159; in Bihar, 158-9; in Assam, Bengal, Congress Provinces, Orissa, Punjab, Sind, 162.
- Ahmad Khan, Sir Syed, 92-3, 95, 110.
- Aiyar, Sir C. P. Ramaswami, 243.
- Aiyar, Subramania, 89.
- Ali, Asaf, 252.
- Ali, C. Rahmat, 191.
- Ali, Muhammad, 135, 137.
- All-India Moslem Conference, 130, 135.
- Ambedkar, Dr., 138, 240.
- Amery, L. S., and Act of 1935, 201; and 'August Offer', 203; and Conciliation Committee, 240 *n.*; and Congress, 203, 207, 218, 248; and the Cripps Proposals, 218, 235; and Dominion Status, 248, 284 *n.*; and 'India First', 203, 207; and Moslem League, 207; and Partition, 203; and Simla Conference proposals, 248-9; and Viceroy's Council, 233 *n.*
- Amritsar, 50-1, 118.
- Anglo-Indian community, 250, 269.
- Announcement of 1917, 110-12 *n.*, 117, 121, 126, 131.
- Army in India, British, 27, 46, 50-1, 127, 140, 144 *n.*
- Army, Indian, 17, 27, 37-41, 50, 59, 60, 67, 91, 124, 140, 187, 195-7, 208, 220, 235, 253, 269 *n.*, 283-4 *n.*
- Assam, 7, 31, 222, 237, 262, 283 *n.*; elections (1937), 153, 164; Governments of (1937-1942), 156, 162, 164, 233, 241; Moslems in, 183, 191, 207, 233, 237, 241, 262; disturbances in, 224; population, 301. *See also* Agrarian reform; Congress; Education; Law and Order; Moslem League; Prisoners, release of political. For Premier, *see* Saadulla, Sir S. M.
- Atlantic Charter, 209.
- Attlee, C., 249.
- 'August Offer', 202-4, 211, 214-15, 236, 255.
- Azad, Maulana Abul Kalam, 173, 201-2, 205, 210-11, 216, 221-2, 250-2, 273, 294.
- 'BACKWARD' areas, 283.
- Baksh, Allah, Premier of Sind, 163 *n.*, 165.
- Balfour, Lord, 110, 141.
- Baluchistan, 189, 191, 237, 261.
- Bande Mataram* (Congress anthem), 174-5.
- Baroda, 38, 179, 243, 301; Maharaja Gaekwar of, 31.
- Benares, 69 *n.*, 78 *n.*, 95.
- Bengal, 19-23, 31, 38-9, 42-3, 53, 72-4, 86, 120, 143, 154-6, 162, 174, 191, 194, 222, 226-7, 262; Moslems in, 9, 10, 21, 38, 84, 105, 154, 237, 262; elections (1937), 104 *n.*, 154, 164; Governments (1937-45), 162-3; population, 301. *See also* Agrarian reform; Communal antagonism; Congress; Education; Law and Order; Moslem League; North-east India (Moslem area); Prisoners, release of political; Prohibition; Strikes. Premier of, *see* Fazl-ul-Huq, A. K.
- Bepin Chandra Pal, 96.
- Bhopal, Nawab of, 137.
- Bihar, 19, 30, 86, 159-60, 223-4; Moslems in, 122; elections (1937), 153; Government (1937-9) 156; education, 160; population, 301. *See also* Agrarian reform; Congress; Law and order; Prisoners, release of political.
- Bihar and Orissa, 86, 143, 153.
- Bikaner, 36; Maharaja of, 136.
- Birla, G. D., 228.

- Bombay (city), 21, 53, 85, 90, 96, 108, 151, 158, 235-6.
- Bombay (Province), 23, 31-3, 43, 72, 74, 76, 84-6, 89; elections (1937), 153, 164, 180; Government of (1937-9), 156, 273 *n.*; Prohibition in, 160; population, 301. *See also* Congress; Moslem League; Sind.
- 'Bombay Plan', 228-30.
- Bonerji, Mr., 89.
- Bose, Subas Chandra, 168, 210.
- Bright, John, 83, 86.
- British community in India, 104 *n.*, 284.
- Burke, Edmund, 29, 43.
- Burma, 31, 38, 59, 96, 143, 264, 280, 284-5; Japan and, 210-12, 226.
- Butler Committee, 149.
- CALCUTTA, 17, 21, 31, 54, 85, 89, 262-3.
- Canals, 52, 57-8.
- Casey, R. G., 242.
- Central Government of India (Governor-General-in-Council), 77, 92-3, 233 *n.*, 240; structure of, 43-5, 72-4, 102, 109, 111, 123, 134, 141, 144-5, 147, 216-17, 245, 248, 253, 270; 'Indianisation' of, 47, 74, 124-5, 245-6; and famines, 52, 227, and Provincial Governments, 87, 100-1, 107, 133, 143-4, 190, 197-8, 200, 227, 248, 268; Indian members of, 92, 130, 134, 159, 197, 199, 200, 208, 215-17, 226, 229, 233; 'Reserved subjects', 112, 121-2, 128, 138-9, 144, 147, 193-4, 229, 245, 268-9; Nehru Report and, 127; Act of 1935 and, 143-5; enlargements of (1941-2), 202, 206, 223 *n.*; Draft Declaration of 1942 and, 213-17.
- Central Legislature (Council of State, and Legislative Assembly), 110, 112, 123-4, 126, 131-4, 144, 153, 193, 200-1, 205, 208, 217, 229, 236, 240, 242, 245-6, 269-71; constitution of, 104-5, 109, 129, 131, 133-4, 141, 150, 184, 245, 269, 271. *See also* Congress, Residual powers.
- Central India, States of, 30, 40.
- Central Provinces, 85; elections (1937-42), 153, 184 *n.*; Governments (1937-9) 156, 171-2; Moslems in, 109; population, 301. *See also* Congress. For Premier, *see* Khare, Dr.
- 'Certification', 112, 123, 151.
- Ceylon, 15, 26, 285.
- Chamber of Princes, 113, 124, 194, 243.
- Chelmsford, Lord, 106, 111, 114, 115, 118.
- Child, Sir Josia, 16, 17, 20.
- China, 44, 53, 59, 66, 175, 208, 219-20, 264, 280.
- Chirol, Sir V., 51, 89.
- Christians, Indian, 115 *n.*, 250, 269.
- Churchill, W. S., 50-1, 142, 201, 209, 212, 287.
- Civil disobedience movement (1930), 135, 138-40, 150; (1940-1), 168, 172-4; (1942), 204-10.
- Civil Services, Indian, 44-7, 65, 91-2, 124-5, 157, 283, 284 *n.*
- Coalition Governments in Provinces, 132, 145, 154, 164-5, 180-1, 185, 188, 193, 197, 233-4, 241, 245, 248, 256, 265-6.
- Cochin, 179.
- Commander-in-Chief, 245, 248. *See also* Wavell, Viscount.
- Communal antagonism, 9-12, 49, 66, 69, 83, 94-5, 106, 120-1, 132, 136, 138, 142, 160, 207, 210, 225, 229 *n.*, 230, 234, 253, 257, 260-3, 266, 274; in United Provinces, 85, 185; in Bihar, 122; in Bengal, 123, 163; in Bombay and Karachi, 151; in Congress Provinces, 158-9, 161, 186-7, 203-4; in non-Congress Provinces, 159; in Punjab, 163, 206; in Sind, 163; in the States, 178-9, 275. *See also* 'Communal Award'; Minorities; Lucknow Pact.
- 'Communal Award', 140-1, 143, 150, 152.
- Communal electorates, representation. *See* Separate electorates.
- Communists, 158, 222.
- Conciliation Committee, 239-40, 244-5, 264 *n.*, 265 *n.*, 266-71.
- Congress, Indian National, 88-97, 100, 103-9, 113, 117-23, 126-32, 136-42, 145-60, 228, 231-5, 249, 254, 257; and Provincial Ministries, 49, 155-65, 171-6, 181, 185-8, 195-9, 207-8, 217, 233, 241, 243 *n.*, 252, 256, 266, 273 *n.*;



Congress—*cont.*

and 'unitarianism', 80, 129-30, 144, 154, 156, 161, 170-2, 189, 207, 233, 246, 267-8; foundation of, 82; and Bombay, 89-90, 153, 156, 160, 164, 273; Moslem members of, 90, 95, 139-40, 150, 153-4, 173, 180, 252; and the States, 90, 129-30, 139, 142, 148, 173, 176-9, 188, 193, 203, 225, 278; and Japan, 96, 211, 222; and Act of 1919, 107, 117-18, 121, 123, 192; and Central Legislature, 109, 123, 150, 184, 193-5, 200, 205, 217, 250; constitution of, 119, 127; and Madras, 118 *n.*, 153, 156, 222; and Bengal, 120, 154, 156, 162-4, 174, 224, 237; and dyarchy, 121, 123; and Nehru Report, 129; and Round Table Conference, 131, 136, 138-40, 142, 173; Working Committee, 138, 151, 156, 161, 167-77, 181-2, 194-207, 210, 215-20, 223, 236, 248, 251; one-party doctrine, 139, 164, 176; and Act of 1935, 145-8, 150, 192; and Mahasabha, 150, 173, 186, 207, 239; and Provincial elections (1937), 151-4; and 'office-acceptance', 152, 155-7, 170-1, 241; and Assam, 153, 156, 162, 164, 224, 237, 241; and Bihar, 153, 156-7, 159-60, 223; and Central Provinces, 153, 156; and N.W.F.P., 153, 156, 162, 223-4, 233, 237, 241; and Orissa, 153, 156, 162, 241; and United Provinces, 153, 156-7, 159-60, 223; All-India Congress Committee (A.I.C.C.), 154, 158, 166-8, 177, 195-6, 204-5, 210, 218-23, 236; and Congress Governments, 154-5, 273 *n.*; Punjab, 156, 162-4, 237; and Scheduled Castes, 156, 180, 222; and Sind, 156, 162-4, 237; and 'Coercion', 157, 180-82; and Communists, 158, 222; 'Centre', 227; and Provincial Committee, 167, 172; Congress Party, 171, 294; and totalitarianism, 175-6; policy (1937-40), 177-244; and the war, 193-200, 205, 210-12, 216-19, 222; Statement of October 1939, 197; orders resignation of Provincial Governments, 198; and 'August Offer', 202-4, 211, 236;

and rebellion of 1942, 224; and official governments in Congress Provinces, 241, 245, 248, 264; and *see also* Civil disobedience; Coalition governments in Provinces; Cripps Mission; Dominion Status; Federation; Gandhi, Mahatma M. K.; Moslem League; Separate electorates.

Constituent Assembly proposed for India, 145-6, 154, 170, 173-4, 178, 188, 198, 207, 221, 252.

Crewe, Lord, 110.

Cripps, Sir Stafford, 212-17, 285.

Cripps Mission, 212-19, 231, 234-6, 244-5, 247, 250-1, 254-5, 295-  
*See also* Draft Declaration of 1942.

Cunningham, Sir G., 241 *n.*

Curzon, Lord, 101, 106, 110, 114.

DALAL, Sir Ardesbir, 229.

Dalhousie, Lord, 34-5, 38-9.

Das, C. R., 120.

Defence of India, 60, 65-6, 82, 109, 127, 200, 202, 206-7, 210, 214, 216, 218-19, 221, 224, 227, 255, 260-3, 268, 280, 286, 297; as a 'reserved subject', 138-9, 144, 147, 193-4. *See also* Army, Indian.

Delhi, 6, 11, 16-18, 40, 118, 151, 208, 213, 215-17.

Desai, Bhulabhai, 245-6, 250, 270.

Dominion Status, 56, 60, 108-11, 115-17, 120, 125-48, 192, 196-7, 201-2, 244, 276, 284-5; Congress and, 107-8, 129-31, 136, 138-9, 146-8, 197, 202, 214-16; pledges of, for India, 109, 111; description of, 125-8; Nehru Report and, 127-30; Simon Report and, 130-5; at Round Table Conference, 135-42; Act of 1935 and, 142-8; Draft Declaration of 1942 and, 213-17.

Draft Declaration of 1942, 213-15, 217-18, 256.

Dufferin, Lord, 89, 90, 100, 102-3, 114.

*Durbars*, 13, 75, 103, 105.

Dyarchy, 35, 44, 121-3, 132, 134, 144, 150, 179.

EDUCATION, 60-1, 86-7, 112, 162, 228; Moslems and, 92, 186; in Bihar and United Provinces, 160.

- Edwardes, Sir Herbert, 293.  
 Egypt, 23, 25, 195, 199, 281.  
 Eire, 193, 230, 259, 285-7. *See also* Ireland.  
 European community in India, 15, 16, 45, 68, 115 *n.*  
 European Group, at Simla Conference, 251.  
 'Excluded areas' in Governors' Provinces, 283.  
 Exports and imports, 54-7, 61, 64, 83, 126.  
 FAMINES, 52-3, 61, 226-8.  
 Fazl-ul-Huq, A. K., 164, 183, 185, 227.  
 Federal schemes for Government of India: Act of 1919 and, 113; Moslems and, 129-30, 137, 188-90, 198, 267, 271; Nehru Report and, 129, 133, 189; Round Table Conference and, 136-42; Act of 1935 and, 142-8, 153, 188, 198, 267; Congress and, 150, 170, 188, 271. *See also* States.  
 Finance, public, 57-61. *See also* National Debt.  
 Fiscal autonomy, 56, 126.  
 Fiscal Convention, 126.  
 France, 20-7, 32, 73, 80, 195, 199, 211.  
 Franchise: under Act of 1892, 100; under Act of 1919, 112; for women, 141; Round Table Conference and, 138-40; under Act of 1935, 143, 146; Congress and, 146, 170.  
 Free trade, 53-6, 59, 260.  
 Frere, Sir Bartle, 74-5.  
 GANDHI, Mahatma M. K.: and Japan, 69 *n.*, 219-20, 222; and Amritsar, 118; and Bengal, 118, 135; arrest (1922), 119; and Congress, 119-20, 131, 135, 138-40, 150-1, 155, 168-9, 173-4, 178, 186, 198, 200, 202, 204-5, 210-12, 218-25, 232, 237-8, 241; and Khilafat Movement, 122, 136; and 'Irwin-Gandhi Pact', 138; and Round Table Conference, 138-40, 173; and the States, 139, 173, 177-9, 276; arrest (1932), 140; hunger-strikes, 141, 178 *n.*, 215, 226; and Scheduled Castes, 141, 150, 248 *n.*; and Lord Linlithgow, 157, 195, 197-8, 204-5; and Prohibition, 159-60; and education, 160, 186; and Constituent Assembly, 173-4; and 'Peace Army', 175; and Congress totalitarianism, 175-6; and the War, 193, 199, 205-8, 211, 218-20; and Statement of October 1939, 196; and 'office-acceptance', 198-9; and the 'August Offer', 202; and the Cripps Mission, 214, 217-19, 236; and Mr. Amery, 218, 235; arrest (1942), 222-3; and rebellion of 1942, 224; and Lord Wavell, 232, 236; and Mr. Jinnah, 236-9, 246; and Pakistan, 237-8. *See also* Nehru, Pandit J.  
 Ghose, Arabinda, 96.  
 Gladstone, W. E., 93 *n.*, 94, 97-101.  
 Gokhale, G. K., 97-8, 106-9, 117, 120-1.  
 Governors, Provincial, 43, 101, 143, 241; Ministers and, in Congress Provinces, 155-6, 163; powers of, 102, 112, 132, 157, 162.  
 Gurkhas, 31 *n.*, 50.  
 Gwalior, 38, 301.  
 HAILEY, Lord, 257 *n.*  
 Halifax, Lord (Lord Irwin), 123, 126, 134, 138.  
 Hardinge, Lord, 33-4, 117.  
 Hastings, Lord, 30, 71, 291.  
 Hastings, Warren, 23, 26, 43.  
 Hidayatullah, Sir G. H., 242.  
 High Commissioner in India, 248.  
 Hindu-Moslem antagonism. *See* Communal Antagonism.  
 Hinduism, 3, 4, 8, 13, 49, 62, 85, 96, 114-18, 122, 136, 186.  
 Hindus, 8-13, 19, 31, 38-9, 84-5, 90-4, 105, 109-10, 115, 118, 121-4, 128-30, 135-8, 141, 144, 152, 157, 164, 169, 173-5, 189, 201, 207, 222; Caste Hindus, 141, 248, 251, 254, 267, 269, 296.  
 Hyat Khan, Malik Khizer, Premier of the Punjab, 234, 249 *n.*, 253.  
 Hyat Khan, Sir Sikander, 183, 233, 268; his scheme for Indian federation, 189-90, 206, 272-3.  
 Hyderabad, 18, 20, 22, 24, 38, 85 *n.*, 178-9, 191, 243, 278, 301.  
 INDIRECT Rule, 78.  
 Industrialism, 53-7, 62, 228-9, 262.

- Inskip, Sir T., 147 *n*.  
 Investments in India, British, 42, 53-4, 69, 82-3, 229.  
 Iqbal, Sir Muhammad. *See* Regionalism.  
 Ireland, 88, 93, 97-9, 103, 128, 174, 193, 230, 259, 285-7.  
 Irrigation, 52, 59.  
 Irwin. *See* Halifax.  
 Irwin-Gandhi Pact, 138.  
 Islam, 5, 8, 9, 13, 183, 186-7, 261.
- JAPAN, 23, 58, 69, 82, 96, 210-12, 218-22, 225-6, 235, 244, 247, 253, 255, 295-7.  
 Jayakar, M. R., 136, 240.  
 Jehangir, Sir Cowasmi, 145.  
 Jinnah, M. A., 109, 124, 130, 151, 197, 212, 216-17, 223, 235, 239-43, 247-50, 256, 259, 268-9; and Moslem League, 108, 110, 123, 137, 150, 165, 180, 183-5, 187-8, 191, 198, 207, 215; and Congress, 123, 150, 152-3, 180, 198, 207, 233; and the Act of 1935, 153, 187; and Pakistan, 184, 191, 206-7, 215, 234, 236-8, 243, 246, 251-4, 270; and Act of 1935, 188, 267; and Constituent Assembly, 188, 198; and Lord Linlithgow, 196, 198, 206; and the War, 198, 206-7; and the 'August Offer', 215; and the Cripps Mission, 215, 234; and Simla Conference, 249.  
 Justice Party in Madras, 122, 152-3.
- KARACHI, 151, 263.  
 Kashmir, 38, 178-9, 191, 301.  
 Khaksars, 163.  
 Khan Sahib, Dr., 241.  
 Khare, Dr., 171-2.  
 Khilafat movement, 122, 136.  
 Kimberley, Lord, 103, 114.
- LAHORE, 33, 191.  
 Lancashire, 55-6, 126.  
 Lansdowne, Lord, 100.  
 Law and Order, in Punjab, 50, 118, 135, 163; in Bengal, 96, 107, 118, 135, 140, 157, 163, 224; in Bihar, 122, 223-4; in Calcutta, 123; in Sind, 163; in United Provinces, 205, 223, 243 *n*.; in Assam, 224.  
 Lawrence, Sir Henry, 71, 82, 293.  
 Lawrence, Lord, 86.
- Lewis, Sir Hawthorne, 241.  
 Liaquat Ali Khan, Nawabzada, 246, 250.  
 Liberals, Indian (All-India Moderate Party, National Liberal Federation), 88, 121, 136-7, 145, 150, 192, 194, 208, 222, 239-40, 247, 265 *n*.; and Pakistan, 207, 270. *See also* Jayakar, M. R., Sapru, Sir T. B.  
 Linlithgow, Lord, 142, 149, 155-7, 193-8, 201-6, 213, 224, 229, 232. *See also* Gandhi, Mahatma M. K.  
 Lothian, Lord, 93 *n*.  
 Lucknow Pact, 108-10, 114-15, 122-3, 128, 140-1, 150, 153.  
 Lytton, Lord, 99.
- MACAULAY, Lord, 41, 45 *n*., 47, 72, 75-6, 90, 113, 292.  
 MacDonald, Ramsay, 136-8, 140.  
 Madras (city), 17, 20-1.  
 Madras (Province), 23-4, 43, 72-6, 85-6, 121-2, 143, 216, 222, 260; elections (1937), 152-3; Government (1937-9), 156; population, 301. For Premier, *see* Rajagopalachari, C.  
 Maharashtra, 17, 18, 26, 31, 84.  
 Mahasabha: origin and growth, 136, 173, 186; and Central Assembly of 1935, 150; and the War, 194, 207; and Pakistan, 211, 238; and Non-Party Conference, 239; and Simla Conference, 251 *n*.; and *see* Moslem League.  
 Mahmud of Ghazni, 6, 10.  
 Malcolm, Sir J., 30, 47.  
 Marathas, 12, 17-19, 22-6, 30-1, 39, 84-5, 91, 95.  
 Mayo, Lord, 99.  
 Mill, James, 29, 30, 72, 75.  
 Mill, J. S., 65, 75-8, 81, 88, 90, 99, 141, 201.  
 Minorities, 79, 132, 155, 162, 176-7; Moslem and the communal, 84-5, 93-4, 104-5, 137-9, 145, 156, 176, 181, 187-9, 192, 202-3, 218, 240, 255, 261, 265, 283, 286; British obligations to, 93, 143, 176, 202, 211, 217, 256-7, 265, 282-3; at Round Table Conference, 136-8, 140-1; and safeguards, 137, 143, 148; Act of 1935 and, 143, 145, 148; and Constituent Assembly, 145, 170, 173; in Congress Pro-

Minorities—*cont.*

- vinces, 155-6, 162; in non-Congress Provinces, 165; 'August Offer' and, 202-3; Draft Declaration of 1942 and, 215.
- Minto, Lord, 25, 99, 104, 106-7.
- Mitter, Sir B. L., 243.
- Moneylenders, 62-3, 91, 159, 186.
- Montagu, Edwin, 111, 120.
- Montagu-Chelmsford Report (1918), 75, 100-2, 106, 110-16, 120, 122, 131-5; and 'faith' of, 115, 142, 192.
- Mookerjee, Dr. S. P., 251.
- Morley, Lord, 99, 103-7, 114, 141.
- Moslem League, 109-10, 129, 179, 208, 221, 236, 275, 278, 294, foundation of, 95; and Congress, 108, 122-3, 150, 152, 165, 173, 180-8, 196, 198, 202-4, 207, 211, 213, 222, 225, 233-241, 245, 249-50, 254, 257; and Lucknow Pact, 108-9, 123, 150; and All-India Moslem Conference, 130; and N.W.F.P., 137, 181, 189, 233, 241-2; and Sind, 137, 181, 189, 233, 237, 242; and Provincial elections (1937), 152-3; in non-Congress Provinces, 154, 165; and United Provinces, 154; Mahasabha and, 173, 211, 238-9; and Punjab, 180-3, 189, 233, 237, 241, 242 *n.*; and Bengal, 181, 207, 233, 237, 241-2; and Assam, 183, 207, 233, 241; and Central Legislature, 184; and Pakistan, 184 *n.*, 191, 207, 211, 215, 230, 237, 240, 254, 276; and Act of 1935, 186, 188, 257, 267; and Partition, 191, 207, 238, 254-5, 257, 276; and the War, 196, 198, 202-3, 207, 211, 222; and 'August Offer', 202-3, 211; 'unitarianism' of, 207; and Cripps Mission, 213, 215, 234, 254; and Bombay, 227; and the rebellion (1942), 236-7; and Baluchistan, 237. *See also* Jinnah, M. A.; Rajagopalachari, C.
- Munro, Sir Thomas, 46, 71, 76, 291-2.
- Munshi, K. M., 273 *n.*
- Mutiny, Indian, 38-41, 47, 50-2, 67, 74, 82-4, 92.
- Mysore, 19, 22-3, 26, 38, 78, 177, 179, 278, 301.
- 'NATIONAL Army', 174-5.
- National Debt, Indian, 58, 82, 284.
- 'National Government', 197, 212, 215-18, 232, 236, 254.
- Nationalist Party, 250.
- Nazimuddin, Khwaja, Sir, 227.
- Nehru, Pandit Jawaharlal, and Dominion Status, 129, 202; and Gandhi, 135, 168-9, 200, 212, 218; imprisonment (1930-3), 135, 150; and Congress, 151, 194, 216; as Socialist, 151; and the War, 151-2, 194, 196, 199, 200, 211-12; and Act of 1935, 152; and 'office-acceptance', 152, 156, 170-1; and the Cripps Mission, 213, 216; on responsibility and power of Congress, 171, 173, 252 *n.*; and the States, 178; and Moslems, 183, 189; imprisonment (1940), 205, 210.
- Nehru, Pandit Motilal, 127.
- Nehru Report, 127-30, 133, 189.
- Nepal, 31 *n.*, 40.
- Non-Party Conference, 239.
- Non-co-operation, 118-22, 132, 145-152, 172, 192, 195, 198, 204, 210-12, 219, 231-2.
- Non-violence, 118-19, 135, 157-8, 175, 179, 195-6, 199, 204-6, 218-23.
- North-East India (Moslem area), 189, 261-3.
- North-West Frontier Province, and elections (1937), 153; Government (1937-42), 156, 162, 171 *n.*, 233, 241, 266 *n.*; and Law and Order, 205, 223; Moslems in, 128, 137, 140, 153, 181, 189, 242; and Provincial autonomy, 137, 143; and Regionalism, 189; and Pakistan, 191, 237, 261; population, 301; and *see* Congress; Moslem League.
- ORISSA, 143 *n.*, 153, 156, 162, 241, 301.
- Ottawa Conference (1932), 57 *n.*
- Oudh, 19, 22, 34-5, 39-40, 289-90; and *see* United Provinces.
- Outram, Sir J., 33.
- PAKISTAN: growth of the idea, 66, 189-91, 201, 203, 251 *n.*, 252-3, 261-3, 273-5; name, 191; Liberals and, 207, 270; C. Rajagopalachari

**Pakistan—*cont.***

and, 219, 237-8; Draft Declaration (1942) and, 215, 218; Cripps Mission and, 234; Gandhi and, 237-8; and *see* Amery, L. S.; Jinnah, M. A.; Sind.

*Panchayats*, 13, 76, 99.

Pandit, Mrs., 243 n.

Panipat, 6, 18, 22.

'Parallel' Government, 174-5, 200.

Paramountcy, 24, 37, 78, 129, 149, 173, 178, 190, 243, 281.

Parliament (British) and India, 42-4, 58, 71-3, 83, 86, 101-2, 112-13, 130-3, 142, 145-7, 193-4, 197-9, 202-3, 209, 217, 231, 235, 248, 284.

Parliamentary government, application of, to India, 71, 75, 88, 102-3, 106, 109-15, 127, 130-4, 141, 144, 155, 162, 176, 180, 188, 192, 233, 241, 244.

Partition of India, case for, 261-2; case against, 262-4, 273. *See also* Moslem League; Pakistan; States.

Patel, Vallabhbhai, 250.

Pathans, 48 n., 59, 241.

Pirpur Report, 185.

Police, Indian, 42, 125, 157-9; 174, 274, 283, 284 n.

'Political Prisoners', 138, 157-8, 165.

Poona Pact, 141, 143.

Population of India, 50, 57, 61-2, 228, 301; transfers of, 262-3.

Prasad, Dr. Rajendra, 156, 198.

Prohibition, 159-60, 162.

Provinces, Congress-majority, 156, 161-4, 171-6, 180-6, 195-9, 241, 252-6; 'Governors' Provinces', 162, 241, 245, 248, 255, 264; Hindu-majority, 85, 97, 153, 180-1, 188-90, 260, 262, 274; Moslem-majority, 91, 128-9, 137, 140, 153-6, 163-5, 180-1, 188-91, 207-14, 233-4, 241-2, 257, 260-1, 269, 272-4.

Provincial autonomy, in finance, 90; growth of, 100, 128, 130, 133, 149-65, 170, 190, 227, 264, 266-7, 271; Act of 1919 and, 107, 109, 113; Nehru Report and, 128, 130; Simon Report and, 133-4; Round Table Conference and, 137; Act of 1935 and, 143; in non-Congress Provinces, 162-5.

Provincial elections (1937), 151-4. Provincial Executive Councils, 109.

Provincial Legislative Councils, 43, 49, 52, 74-5, 86-7, 90-2, 101-9, 112-13, 124-5, 129-33, 143-4, 151-2, 155-9, 162-5, 170-5, 180-1, 184, 190, 194, 197-8, 200, 205, 227, 241, 245, 248-9, 254, 264, 272; and budgets, 90, 100, 102-4, 151, 155, 160; and 'transferred subjects', 112-13, 121, 132.

'Provincialism', 133-4, 171.

Punjab, 6, 7, 18, 19, 26, 31-4, 39, 40, 50-1, 83-4, 91, 105, 109, 191, 223, 261; elections (1937), 152, 154; Government of (1937-42), 156, 162-5, 180-3, 194, 206-7, 233-4, 262; and Regionalism, 189-90; population of, 301. *See also* Law and Order; Moslem League; Pakistan; Unionist Party. For Premier, *see* Hyat Khan, Malik Khizer.

'Quit India' policy, 231-8, 250, 252.

RAILWAYS, 52, 57-9, 69, 229.

Rajagopalachari, C., Premier of Madras, 156, 200-1, 206, 218, 231, 234-5, 259; and Japan, 210-12, 219, 222; and Moslem League, 212, 237-8; resignation from Congress, 219, 232, 237, 249 n.

Rajkot, 178-9.

Rajput States, 6, 8, 11, 35, 38, 179.

Reay, Lord, 80.

Regionalism; Sir Muhammad Iqbal's idea of, 189, 272-4; Sir Sikander Hyat Khan's plan for (Seven-Region Scheme), 189-90, 273-4; and Centre, 190; Hindus and, 190; Moslems and, 190. *See also* States.

Representative government, 75-83, 89, 93, 100-6, 148, 179.

Reserve Bank of India, 228.

Residual powers, 129-30, 141, 144, 268.

Responsible government, 56, 88, 102, 109-13, 117, 121, 127-38, 143, 149-51, 157, 161-5, 170-1, 177-9, 188, 214, 220-1, 232; restoration of, in 'Section 93 Provinces', 245, 248, 255, 264.

Revenue. *See* Finance, Public.

Ripon, Lord, 68, 82, 100, 114.

- Round Table Conference, 131, 135-45, 150, 173, 191, 239.
- Russia, 32, 73, 82, 96, 110, 208, 212.
- SAADULLAH, Sir Syed Muhammad, Premier of Assam, 183, 241.
- Safeguards ('Special Responsibilities'), 93, 105, 114, 132, 137, 143-8, 155, 157, 181-2, 187-8, 193.
- Salisbury, Lord (3rd Marquess), 100, 103, 114, 141.
- Salisbury, Lord (4th Marquess), 142.
- Sapru, Sir Tej Bahadur, 137, 208, 239-40, 247.
- Sarkar, N. R., 240.
- Satyagraha*. See Civil Disobedience.
- Savarkar, V. D., 96, 186-7, 211, 251.
- Scheduled Castes (Depressed Classes, 'Outcastes'), 4, 136, 138, 141, 150, 156, 180, 222, 240, 247, 248 n., 250-1, 254, 269-70, 282.
- Secession, right of, 98, 129-31, 138-9, 214, 282, 285, 287.
- Second Chamber, 141.
- Secretary of State for India, 58, 74-5, 100-3, 107, 109, 112-15, 123, 125, 133, 147, 193, 201, 227, 235, 256; office and powers of, 43, 126, 143, 149.
- 'Secretary of State's Services', 283.
- Self-determination, 110, 177, 189, 261.
- Separate electorates, 104, 109-10, 144, 266-7; Congress and, 105, 108, 146, 170, 188; Moslem League and, 108, 184, 265; Montagu-Chelmsford Report and, 114, 115 n.; Nehru Report and, 128, 130; Simon Report and, 132; Round Table Conference and, 137-8, 140-1; 'Communal Award' and, 140-1; Act of 1935 and, 145-6.
- Separatism, 187-92. See Pakistan; Partition; Two-Nation Doctrine.
- Setalvad, Sir Chimanlal, 265 n.
- Shafi, Sir Muhammad, 108.
- Shareef Report, 185.
- Sikhs, 3, 19, 31, 33-4, 39-40, 83-4, 115 n., 127, 136, 154, 173, 250-1, 255, 269, 274; and Punjab Government, 163-4, 234, 262. See also Minorities.
- Simla Conference, 246-55, 270, 273.
- Simon Commission, 127, 130-6, 142; Committees of, 131, 135.
- Sind: separation from Bombay, 84, 86, 128, 143 n., 278; and Provincial autonomy, 137, 143; elections (1937), 154, 164; Governments (1937-9), 156, 162-5, 194, 223, 242; Moslems in, 154, 156, 163, 181, 233, 242; and Regionalism, 189; and Pakistan, 191, 237, 261, 278; population, 301. See also Moslem League.
- Sivaji, 18, 22, 94, 96.
- Slavery, 49, 72, 152.
- Sleeman, W. H., 34-5, 289-90.
- South Africa, Union of, 59, 116-17, 126, 146, 281, 285-8.
- States, Indian, treaties between Britain and the, 35-6, 78, 112, 178-9, 202, 257, 277, 281; Act of 1919 and, 112; Nehru Report and, 128-30; and federation of India, 128-31, 134, 142, 144, 147-50, 179, 230, 243; Round Table Conference and, 131, 136, 140, 150; Act of 1935 and, 142, 144-5, 148; All-India States People's Conference, 178; and Regionalism, 187-90; absorption of small states, 189; Draft Declaration of 1942 and, 214; 'August Offer' and, 232, 276; and Partition, 243, 259-60, 270-2, 276-8; and the War, 243; Government of, 275, 277; Moslem League and, 278; and right of secession, 214, 287; Crown Representative and, 297; population, 301.
- Statute of Westminster, 125-6, 146, 197 n.
- Strikes, 158, 163.
- Suttee, 4, 49.
- Switzerland, 80-1, 132, 141, 266.
- TARIFFS, 55-7, 125-6, 268-9. See also Fiscal Autonomy; Fiscal Convention.
- Tata Company, the, 57, 228.
- Telegu language, 85.
- Tennessee Valley Authority, 273 n.
- Thuggee*, 49 n.
- Tilak, B. G., 94, 96-7, 117, 119.
- Travancore, 19, 24, 38, 178-9, 243, 301.
- Turkey, 5, 122, 136. See also Khilafat Movement.
- Two-Nation Doctrine, 139, 164, 201, 203, 209.

- UNIONIST Party (Punjab), 152, 154, 164, 180, 183-4, 233-4, 242, 253.
- United Provinces, 85, 278; Moslems in 105, 154, 180, 294; 'no rent' campaign in, 140; elections (1937), 153; Government of (1937-9), 156-60, 185, 294; Congress army raised in, 174; population, 301. *See also* Law and Order.
- VICTORIA, Queen, 41, 47, 83, 89.
- WAVELL, Viscount, 216, 228-36, 245-56, 295, 299, 300.
- Wedderburn, Sir W., 89.
- 'Weightage', 104, 109, 128, 130, 145, 265, 267.
- Wellesley, Marquess of, 23-30, 34, 45 n.
- Wellington, Duke of, 24-5.
- Women, status of, 4, 49, 62, 141.
- Wood, Sir Charles, 75.
- Wyllie, Sir Curzon, 96.
- YULE, Sir H., 89.
- ZAFRULLA Khan, Sir Muhammad, 247, 257, 268-9, 272.

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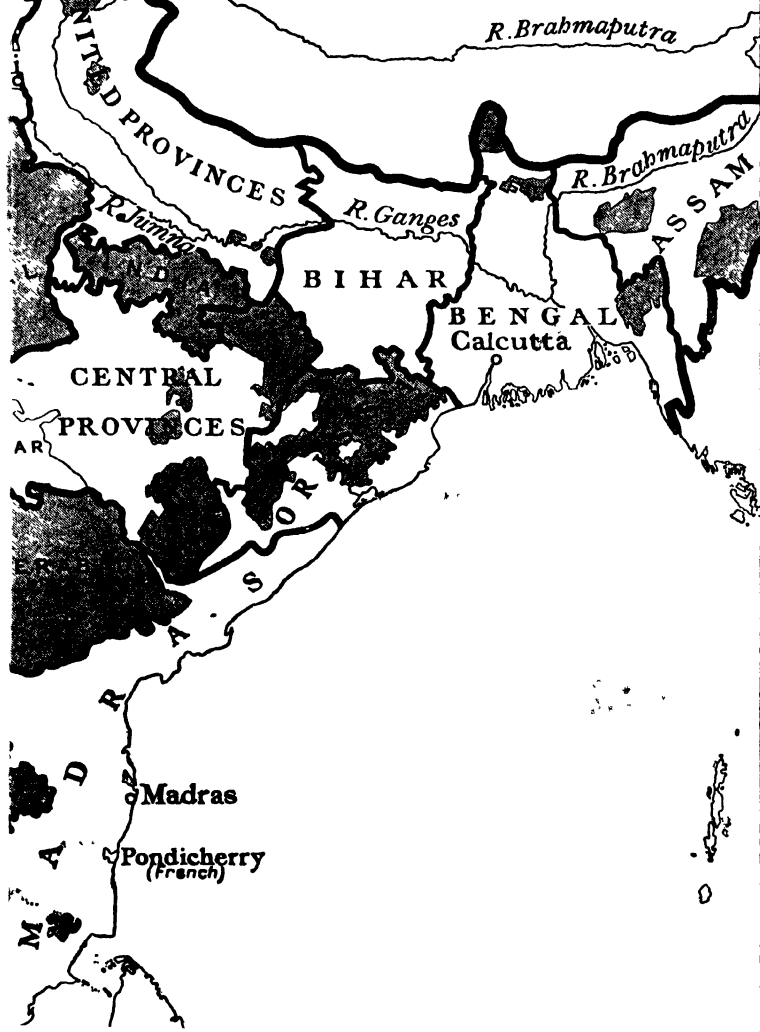
# THE INDIAN PROVINCES AND STATES SINCE 1937

States and Tribal Areas indicated thus: 

To the left of the Indian map are shown on the same scale outlines of the British Isles, Massachusetts and Texas for the purpose of comparison.

Scale of Miles

0 50 100 200 300 400 500











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